

English Learning Difficulties Experienced by Students with Poor Vocabulary in University

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ABSTRACT

This study explored English Education students' experiences of learning difficulties caused by limited vocabulary mastery at Tadulako University. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved students who experienced vocabulary-related challenges in learning English. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that inadequate vocabulary knowledge created difficulties in understanding unfamiliar words, retaining vocabulary, pronouncing English words accurately, and selecting appropriate words in speaking and writing activities. These challenges negatively affected students' performance across the four language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—and reduced their participation in classroom interactions. Limited vocabulary also generated emotional barriers, including anxiety, embarrassment, and low self-confidence when using English. To overcome these difficulties, students employed various independent learning strategies, such as watching movies and YouTube videos, listening to music, playing games, and using digital learning applications. Students also expressed the need for more structured vocabulary instruction and supportive learning environments. Overall, the study highlights that vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of successful language learning, influencing students' academic achievement, communication ability, and confidence in using English.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Difficulties, English Learning, EFL Students, Students' Experiences, Vocabulary Mastery, Qualitative Study Experiences, Vocabulary Mastery, Qualitative Study*

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INTRODUCTION

Challenges in vocabulary learning are influenced by both psychological and linguistic factors. Psychological factors include students' motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, while linguistic factors relate to their ability to understand word meanings, use words appropriately in context, and pronounce them correctly. Previous studies have shown that difficulties in recalling appropriate vocabulary can cause problems in both spoken and written communication (Susanto et al., 2021). In addition, low motivation and self-confidence, combined with linguistic difficulties such as understanding meanings, contextual usage, and pronunciation, can worsen students' vocabulary learning difficulties and negatively affect their overall English performance (Telaumbanua et al., 2024). These factors together indicate that vocabulary learning problems are complex and require serious attention in English language instruction.

In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning, vocabulary difficulties remain a common problem among students. Many students find it hard to understand new words, remember them for a long time, and use them correctly when speaking or writing. These difficulties often become worse because students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, so they do not get enough chances to practice. As a result, vocabulary learning becomes slow and uneven, and students may feel frustrated, anxious, and less confident when using English to communicate (Idayani et al., 2024). This situation shows

that vocabulary difficulties are not only academic issues but also affect students' emotional and communicative development.

A similar condition also occurred among English students at Tadulako university. Even after several semesters of English study, English Education students at Tadulako University still face various difficulties related to vocabulary mastery. They often have trouble understanding key words in academic texts, finding the right words when speaking, constructing clear and accurate sentences when writing, and speaking fluently. These challenges also occur during classroom activities such as presentations and discussions, where students often feel hesitant and lack confidence to participate due to limited vocabulary knowledge. Their fear of making mistakes in spelling, pronunciation, and choosing appropriate words further hinders their overall English performance, particularly in speaking and writing (Idayani et al., 2024; Lutfiyah & Nuraeningsih, 2022). These difficulties indicate that limited vocabulary mastery remains a serious issue affecting students' academic performance at Tadulako University.

Limited vocabulary has long been recognized as one of the main obstacles for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in learning English. (Qasim & Hakami, 2025) studied the effect of vocabulary mastery on overall English ability and found that students with poor vocabulary struggle to understand reading materials, form correct sentences, and express their ideas clearly. This lack of vocabulary knowledge directly affects their speaking, writing, and listening skills, showing that vocabulary is at the heart of language competence. However, the study mainly focused on the relationship between vocabulary mastery and language proficiency, without exploring students' personal learning experiences in depth.

While vocabulary plays a central role in developing overall English proficiency, many EFL students continue to face persistent difficulties in learning and retaining new words. A study by (Rohmatillah, 2014) investigated the vocabulary learning problems faced by EFL students and found that students commonly struggled with understanding word meanings, pronouncing unfamiliar words, spelling, and remembering new vocabulary. These difficulties negatively affected students' participation in communication activities. Although this study provides important insights into the types of vocabulary problems experienced by students, it primarily emphasized identifying difficulties rather than exploring how students experience and respond to these challenges in their daily learning process.

In addition to linguistic difficulties, vocabulary problems also influence students' psychological aspects in language learning. (Idayani et al., 2024) found that examined university students' vocabulary mastery problems and reported that poor vocabulary negatively impacted students' confidence when speaking, caused anxiety during class participation, and reduced their willingness to communicate. Their findings highlight affective and psychological elements of students' experiences, which are also central to this research. Nevertheless, the study focused mainly on measuring students' vocabulary problems and emotional responses, leaving limited discussion on students' broader learning experiences across cognitive, social, and academic aspects.

Students' vocabulary limitations also affect their engagement with specific language skills, particularly reading. (Suhaili, 2024) highlighted that EFL learners with poor vocabulary frequently paused while reading to guess word meanings or consult dictionaries, which disrupted reading flow and led to frustration and decreased motivation. However, this study was restricted to reading skills only and did not examine students' overall English learning experiences in a wider academic context.

Based on the reviewed studies, it can be concluded that previous research has widely discussed vocabulary difficulties and their effects on specific language skills or psychological factors. However, most studies tend to focus on isolated aspects, such as vocabulary mastery, reading difficulties, or affective responses. Few studies have explored EFL students' holistic learning experiences encompassing cognitive, affective, social, and academic dimensions, particularly among English Education students at the university level. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by exploring English Education students' comprehensive

experiences in facing English learning difficulties caused by limited vocabulary at Tadulako University.

Taken together, these studies indicate that vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in English learning and significantly influences students' language skills and learning outcomes. However, most previous studies have focused on specific language skills or employed quantitative approaches, leaving students' holistic learning experiences insufficiently explored. Therefore, a qualitative exploration of English Education students' experiences related to vocabulary difficulties is necessary.

Therefore, this study aims to explore English Education students' experiences of English learning difficulties caused by limited vocabulary at Tadulako University using a qualitative approach. This study focuses on students' real learning experiences in cognitive, emotional, social, and academic aspects to gain a deeper understanding of how vocabulary limitations influence their learning process and how they deal with these difficulties in actual classroom situations. In addition, this study seeks to provide constructive recommendations based on students' experiences in dealing with these difficulties. The findings are expected to serve as valuable input for improving the quality of English language learning in higher education.

METHOD

This research applied a descriptive qualitative design because the main purpose was to explore and describe students' experiences in facing English learning difficulties due to poor vocabulary. A qualitative design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to focus on meanings, perspectives, and participants lived experiences rather than numerical data or statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design enabled the researcher to capture students' voices and present their experiences comprehensively. Qualitative research is particularly useful for understanding social phenomena from the participants' perspectives and interpreting the meanings they attach to their experiences. In this study, the phenomenon referred to the challenges faced by English Education students at Tadulako University when dealing with vocabulary limitations in learning English. A descriptive qualitative approach enabled the researcher to present the findings systematically and directly without manipulating variables, focusing instead on the actual situations experienced by the participants (Sandelowski, 2000).

This research was conducted at Tadulako University, specifically in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), English Language Education Study Program, Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. This location was selected because the research focused on exploring English Language Education students' experiences in facing English learning difficulties caused by limited vocabulary. As English is the core subject in this study program, students are required to actively use English in various academic activities, such as classroom discussions, presentations, and academic writing. Therefore, this setting was considered appropriate for examining students' learning experiences related to vocabulary challenges.

Respondents

The participants of this study were students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they were able to provide rich and relevant information aligned with the objectives of the study (Palinkas et al., 2020; Patton, 2014). Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research because it enables researchers to intentionally select information-rich cases that can provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation. To be included in this study, the participants had to meet several criteria. First, they had to be active students in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. Second, they had to be in the fourth semester or have completed at least three semesters of English courses, ensuring that they had sufficient experience with university-level English learning activities. Third, they had to experience difficulties in learning English related to limited vocabulary. Finally, they had to be willing to participate voluntarily and share their experiences openly.

during the interview process. These inclusion criteria were established to ensure that the selected participants possessed sufficient experience and knowledge to provide meaningful information regarding the research topic.

Instruments

Research instruments were tools used by researchers to collect data that were relevant to the objectives of the study. In qualitative research, the primary instrument was the researcher themselves, who played a role in planning, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. However, to support the data collection process so that it was more systematic and accurate, this study employed several supporting instruments. The instruments used in this study were interview questions and an audio recording device (mobile phone recording). These instruments functioned as tools to facilitate the collection of verbal data from the participants during the interview process. The data in this study were collected through interviews with selected participants. The data collection procedure was carried out systematically to ensure that the data obtained were relevant, accurate, and aligned with the research objectives.

Interview Questions

The interview questions used in this study were semi-structured, open-ended questions that functioned as the primary research instrument to guide the data collection process. This type of interview was selected because it provided a clear framework while allowing participants to express their experiences freely and in detail (Kallio et al., 2016). As an instrument, the interview guide consisted of a prepared list of flexible questions designed to elicit descriptive and reflective responses rather than brief or predetermined answers. The interview questions were developed based on the research objectives and organized into several thematic areas, including students' vocabulary difficulties, the impact of limited vocabulary on English language skills, students' experiences from cognitive, affective, social, and academic perspectives, and the strategies they used to cope with vocabulary-related difficulties. The semi-structured and open-ended nature of the interview enabled the researcher to obtain rich and in-depth qualitative data while maintaining consistency with the focus of the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Audio Recorder

The instrument used to record the interviews in this study was a mobile phone audio recorder. This device was selected because of its practicality, accessibility, and ability to produce clear and reliable audio recordings. The use of a digital audio recorder is recommended in qualitative research because it allows researchers to capture participants' responses accurately and completely, thereby minimizing the loss of important information during interviews. The use of a mobile phone recorder enabled the researcher to focus more on interacting with participants and probing their responses rather than on extensive note-taking. Furthermore, the audio recordings contributed to the accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness of the qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All recordings were stored securely and treated confidentially to protect participants' privacy. The recordings were used solely for research purposes and were subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate systematic data analysis.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted individually with each participant. Before the interviews began, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their voluntary consent to participate. All interview sessions were audio-recorded using a mobile phone recording device with the participants' permission. The recordings ensured that participants' responses were captured accurately and completely, allowing the researcher to concentrate on the interview process rather than extensive note-taking. Following each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. These

verbatim transcripts served as the primary source of qualitative data for the subsequent analysis. Verbatim transcription is essential in qualitative research because it preserves participants' original expressions and meanings, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which was later refined by Miles et al. (2014). This model consists of three interconnected processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The interactive nature of this model allows researchers to analyze qualitative data continuously throughout the research process rather than only after data collection has been completed. After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. During the data reduction stage, irrelevant information was eliminated, while meaningful statements, experiences, and recurring patterns related to vocabulary difficulties were identified and coded. This process simplified the data without losing their essential meanings. The reduced data were then organized into categories and themes representing students' vocabulary difficulties, their cognitive, affective, social, and academic experiences, and the strategies they used to overcome those difficulties. The findings were presented through thematic descriptions and supporting tables to facilitate interpretation and identify relationships among themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified by reviewing the data repeatedly to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the participants' experiences and were supported by sufficient evidence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at Tadulako University to explore "EFL Students' Experiences of English Learning Difficulties Caused by Poor Vocabulary at Tadulako University." This chapter presents the findings obtained through semi-structured interviews with students of the English Education Study Program who have experienced challenges in learning English due to limited vocabulary mastery. The data provide an overview of how poor vocabulary affects students' academic performance, classroom participation, speaking ability, and emotional well-being. The findings also highlight the strategies students use to overcome these difficulties and their perspectives on improving vocabulary mastery. Overall, this chapter emphasizes the important role of vocabulary knowledge in successful English learning and serves as the basis for further discussion in relation to relevant theories and previous studies.

Interview Guide Result

The responses from the six informants show that learning English at university, especially vocabulary, is still challenging. Most students said their vocabulary remains limited and does not improve much through classroom learning alone. They usually rely on personal efforts such as writing new words, checking meanings, studying independently, using phones, or learning from friends. This shows that vocabulary development depends more on self-learning than classroom instruction. Some students also felt that university learning focuses more on theory than vocabulary practice. However, listening, speaking, and public speaking classes were considered helpful because they gave students more chances to practice and learn new words.

Informant 2: "It is the same as what Uni said before. When we study in class, we hear many new vocabulary words. So, from there, we write them down, like, "Oh, they said this word." I have limited vocabulary, so when the lecturer or my friends say something, I write it down so it can become new vocabulary for me."

The responses from the six informants show that limited vocabulary creates difficulties in

learning English, especially in speaking, listening, comprehension, and confidence. Most students explained that their lack of vocabulary prevents them from expressing ideas fluently, even when they know what they want to say. As a result, they often hesitate, mix English with Indonesian, or choose to remain silent. Several informants also stated that limited vocabulary makes it harder to understand lecturers' explanations, especially when unfamiliar or complex words are used. In addition, pronunciation and memorization were major challenges because students often struggle with spelling, pronunciation, and remembering words they rarely use. These difficulties affect academic performance and reduce students' confidence and willingness to participate actively in class.

Informant 2: "The most difficult subjects are Speaking and Listening. Because of limited vocabulary, it makes us hesitant to speak, as we don't know what to say."

The responses from the six informants show that limited vocabulary affects students' participation in discussions, presentations, and assignments. Most students feel less confident, hesitate to speak, and rely on prepared texts, translation tools, AI, or mobile phones to communicate. Limited vocabulary also makes it difficult for them to complete assignments independently. Overall, poor vocabulary reduces students' confidence and classroom participation.

Informant 2: "Yes, it is difficult to participate in class because we are required to use English, right? So even when I want to express my opinion, I still think twice because I am afraid, they might ask me again, and I would have to respond in English. Since my vocabulary is limited, that makes it very difficult. I am afraid of making mistakes."

The responses from the six informants show that vocabulary problems significantly affect students' participation in discussions, presentations, and assignments. Most students feel less confident when speaking English, so they avoid participating or contribute only a little. In presentations, many rely on prepared texts, mobile phones, or digital tools to organize ideas and speak more smoothly. Without these supports, they often struggle to express themselves and may switch to Indonesian. Limited vocabulary also makes it difficult to answer questions, understand discussions, and complete assignments independently. Some students even depend on AI tools, search engines, and translation applications to help them. Overall, poor vocabulary reduces classroom participation, confidence, and academic engagement.

Informant 2: "Afraid to speak because of limited vocabulary. In listening, I don't understand anything because of the pronunciation as well. Especially now that we already have Speaking in IELTS, our vocabulary is still limited, but our listening is already at the IELTS level, so it is very difficult. In writing, it is difficult to write sentences, especially because of grammar, and we don't have a grammar course, so it is very difficult."

Based on the responses of the six informants, being unable to understand or use English words correctly often causes strong emotional reactions. Most students reported feeling sad, embarrassed, nervous, and insecure when they struggled with vocabulary. Several felt left behind compared to classmates who were more fluent, which reduced their self-confidence and made them question their abilities. Some even blamed themselves for not improving despite their efforts. These experiences show that vocabulary difficulties affect not only academic performance but also students' emotional well-being and self-confidence.

Informant 2: "Just like my friend mentioned earlier, I felt sad. I also felt far behind my classmates because of my lack of vocabulary."

The responses of the six informants show that students use various personal strategies to overcome poor vocabulary through informal and self-directed learning. Many rely on enjoyable activities such as watching movies, YouTube videos, cartoons, and Netflix to learn new vocabulary. Others use games, music, comics, online interactions, and applications like Duolingo. Some also practice listening and memorize vocabulary lists to improve pronunciation and word recognition. Overall, students choose strategies that match their interests and actively learn vocabulary outside the classroom.

Informant 2: "Yes, I still start from the basics first, like watching English cartoons such as Sophia. I learn more from watching cartoons because I do not really like watching podcasts since the topics are too heavy and less interesting."

The responses of the six informants show that the most effective strategies for improving vocabulary are those that provide direct exposure and practical use of English. Many participants found watching movies, YouTube videos, and social media content helpful because they could hear pronunciation, understand meaning through context, and see how words are used naturally. Others considered games and interactive applications effective because they make learning more engaging and allow immediate practice. Some also highlighted the importance of memorizing and using vocabulary repeatedly in daily life. Overall, these findings suggest that enjoyable, interactive, and context-based activities are seen as the most effective ways to improve vocabulary.

Informant 2: "I watch YouTube videos, but I forgot the topic. They give us vocabulary memorization for one day. I also use Kahoot, the Kahoot application, to improve vocabulary."

The responses of the six informants show that students expect both academic and emotional support from lecturers to improve their vocabulary. Many wanted regular vocabulary practice such as memorization tasks, quizzes, and daily vocabulary targets to help strengthen retention. They also emphasized the importance of speaking activities that encourage active vocabulary use in class. In addition, students needed supportive lecturers who give constructive feedback and create a comfortable learning environment. Some also preferred mixed language explanations for better understanding. Overall, students value structured vocabulary activities and positive lecturer support to improve both vocabulary mastery and confidence.

Informant 2: "In Speaking class before, we were asked to tell stories about what happened to us in one week. I think that was helpful because we started arranging words to speak when meeting the Speaking lecturer. So, we practiced more often."

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study by connecting them with relevant theories and previous studies. The results show that poor vocabulary significantly affects EFL students' learning experiences, including their ability to understand lessons, express ideas, and participate in classroom activities. It also creates emotional challenges such as anxiety, embarrassment, and low self-confidence, which often reduce students' willingness to communicate. Academically, students face difficulties in presentations, discussions, and assignments, while many rely on external tools as temporary support. These findings highlight that vocabulary difficulties influence multiple aspects of learning and require effective strategies and supportive teaching practices to improve students' language development.

Overall, the findings show that limited vocabulary affects students cognitively, emotionally, socially, and academically. Vocabulary difficulties reduced students' ability to understand lessons, express ideas clearly, participate actively in classroom interactions, and perform academic tasks such as presentations, discussions, listening, reading, and writing activities. Many students struggled to speak fluently because they could not recall appropriate words, while others had difficulty understanding spoken and written English. Emotionally, students experienced anxiety, embarrassment, insecurity, frustration, and low confidence when using English, especially during speaking activities. Socially, many students became passive and avoided interaction because they were afraid of making mistakes or being judged negatively by others.

Discussion of Vocabulary Difficulties Experienced by Students



The findings show that students experienced various vocabulary difficulties during their English learning process. Most participants explained that they often struggled to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, remember previously learned words, pronounce English words correctly, and use appropriate vocabulary in speaking and writing activities. Many students admitted that they actually understood the ideas they wanted to communicate, but they could not express them effectively because they lacked the necessary vocabulary. This situation often caused communication to become slow, fragmented, and unclear. Students also reported that they frequently forgot vocabulary that they had previously memorized, especially when the words were rarely used in daily communication. This indicates that vocabulary retention remains a major challenge for EFL learners.

These findings are consistent with (Rohmatillah, 2014), who found that EFL students commonly experience difficulties in understanding meanings, pronunciation, spelling, and remembering vocabulary. Similarly, (Lutfiyah & Nuraeningsih, 2022) explained that limited vocabulary often prevents students from speaking fluently and participating actively in communication activities. The present study further supports these findings by showing that vocabulary difficulties continue to affect students even at the university level, particularly among English Education students who are expected to actively use English in academic contexts.

The Impact of Poor Vocabulary on English Learning

The findings reveal that poor vocabulary significantly affects students' English learning process, especially in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Speaking was identified as the most affected skill because students often hesitated when expressing ideas, mixed Indonesian with English, or chose to remain silent because they could not recall appropriate vocabulary. Many participants explained that they needed additional time to think before speaking because they were afraid of using incorrect words or grammar. As a result, their communication became less fluent and less effective. Students also felt that limited vocabulary reduced their ability to participate actively in discussions, presentations, and spontaneous classroom conversations.

In writing activities, students experienced difficulty developing ideas because of limited word choices. Many students tended to use repetitive vocabulary and simple sentence structures because they lacked knowledge of alternative words and expressions. Some participants also explained that they depended heavily on translation applications and AI tools when completing assignments. This finding shows that vocabulary limitations influence students' academic writing ability and reduce their independence during learning activities. Overall, the findings demonstrate that vocabulary mastery is fundamental for supporting students' performance in all language skills and academic tasks.

Affective and Emotional Impact of Vocabulary Difficulties

The findings demonstrate that vocabulary difficulties have a strong emotional and psychological impact on students during the English learning process. Many participants reported feeling anxious, embarrassed, insecure, nervous, and afraid of making mistakes when they were asked to speak or participate in classroom activities. These emotional reactions commonly appeared during presentations, discussions, speaking performances, and question-and-answer sessions. Several students explained that they became uncomfortable whenever they could not recall appropriate vocabulary or failed to understand English expressions used by lecturers and classmates.

Many participants also expressed feelings of frustration and disappointment toward themselves because they believed their English ability should have improved after studying English for several semesters at university. Some students stated that they often questioned their own abilities when they compared themselves to classmates who appeared more fluent and confident in speaking English. This comparison created feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, especially among students who considered themselves far behind their peers.

Social and Classroom Interaction Challenges

The findings indicate that limited vocabulary negatively affects students' classroom interaction and social participation. Many students preferred to remain silent during discussions because they lacked confidence and feared making mistakes. Even when students understood the topic, they often hesitated to express their ideas due to limited vocabulary knowledge. The present study also found that students frequently relied on prepared texts, memorized responses, translation tools, and AI applications to support communication. While these strategies helped students temporarily, they also reduced opportunities for spontaneous interaction. This finding suggests that vocabulary limitations can create passive learning behavior and reduce authentic communication practice in the classroom.

Students' Strategies in Overcoming Vocabulary Difficulties

Despite the difficulties they experienced, students actively used various strategies to improve their vocabulary mastery. Many participants preferred enjoyable and informal learning methods such as watching movies, YouTube videos, social media content, listening to music, playing games, and using language-learning applications. Students believed that these activities helped them learn vocabulary more naturally because they could directly hear pronunciation, see how words are used in context, and understand meanings through subtitles or visual situations. The findings are also related to Dual Coding Theory, which explains that vocabulary is easier to remember when learners receive visual and verbal input simultaneously. Watching videos and movies provides students with pronunciation, written forms, and contextual meaning at the same time, making vocabulary learning more meaningful and memorable. In addition, several students used repetition, memorization, note-taking, and daily practice to strengthen vocabulary retention.

Students' Expectations of Lecturer Support

The findings show that students expect both academic and emotional support from lecturers to help improve their vocabulary mastery. Many participants wanted lecturers to provide structured vocabulary activities such as quizzes, memorization tasks, vocabulary exercises, and speaking practice that could help them learn vocabulary consistently. Students believed that regular practice and repeated exposure to vocabulary would help them remember and use words more effectively in classroom communication. Besides academic support, students also emphasized the importance of emotional support from lecturers during the learning process. Many participants explained that they felt more confident when lecturers gave constructive feedback, encouragement, and positive responses toward mistakes. Students preferred supportive classroom environments where they could practice speaking English without fear of being judged or embarrassed.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concluded that limited vocabulary mastery remains a major challenge for English Education students at Tadulako University and significantly affects their English learning. Students experienced difficulties understanding unfamiliar words, remembering vocabulary, selecting appropriate words in speaking and writing, and pronouncing English words accurately. These challenges influenced both receptive and productive language skills, with speaking identified as the most affected because students often hesitated to express ideas due to limited vocabulary and fear of making mistakes. Vocabulary limitations also reduced reading comprehension, hindered listening performance, and restricted idea development in writing. Beyond linguistic difficulties, students reported emotional, social, and academic consequences, including anxiety, low self-confidence, and reluctance to participate in classroom discussions and presentations. To overcome these challenges, students adopted self-directed learning strategies such as watching movies, using social media, listening to music, playing games, and utilizing digital learning applications. The findings highlight that

vocabulary mastery is fundamental to language proficiency, classroom participation, confidence, and academic achievement. Therefore, strengthening vocabulary instruction should become a priority in supporting English learning at the university level.

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