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## Exploring EFL Junior High School Students In Learning Vocabulary Through Word Mapping Strategy : A Case Study

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### ABSTRACT

Students' weak vocabulary mastery affects their ability to form sentences in oral and written communication, leading to low motivation and limited classroom interaction. This study examines students' responses to using word-mapping strategies in vocabulary learning. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving six seventh-grade students in the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. Data were collected through observations and interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that word mapping encourages active student engagement, reflected in their affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses. Most students displayed positive feelings, motivation, and interest in learning. Their behavior also supported these emotions, as motivated students were more active and responsive in class interactions. However, excessive student activity occasionally disrupted peers' concentration. Despite this, class participation helped students better understand vocabulary and improve their language acquisition skills. This study concludes that positive affective responses and engaging word-mapping strategies enhance vocabulary learning and encourage student participation. However, effective classroom management is essential to minimize distractions and optimize learning quality.

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is a fundamental part of the language used in various conditions, both in spoken and written form (Hakim, 2019). The more understanding students have, the easier it is for them to develop the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English as a second language. Vocabulary includes knowledge about the meaning of words, word forms, and how to use them appropriately in a sentence. Therefore, the amount of insight one has will influence a person's communication effectiveness.

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The digitalization era requires students to master English as an essential skill, and English is used in all aspects of life. It is in line with achieving the goals of learning English in Indonesia for grade 7 (phase D), where students need to have English communicative skills both orally and in writing. However, the limitations and differences in achievement of each student affect the achievement of the learning objectives themselves. It is proven by the complex problem of junior high school students' English language skills in basic understanding. This problem is also influenced by the lexical diversity of language (Dröse & Prediger, 2021; Myhill, 2000). This obstacle is the main problem for students in mastering English. The more understanding they have, the more students will better understand communicating both orally and in writing (Zaytseva et al., 2021).

Various factors also influence this vocabulary limitation. These factors consist of socio-cultural variations, language, customs, educational programs, and perspectives have led to intriguing disparities within the scope of this study (Bahri & Sitorus, 2022). Unlike some Asian nations such as Singapore (Bahri & Sitorus, 2022), the Philippines (Turmudi & Hajan, 2020), and Malaysia (Kam, 2002), where English is actively utilized as a second language, in Indonesia, English holds a more passive role (Bahri & Sitorus, 2022). Indonesia perceives English as a foreign language, contrasting with the aforementioned countries (Masduqi, 2011). This distinction poses a challenge for students in grasping the language due to differences in linguistic aspects between English and their native tongue (Nishizawa et al., 2018). Similar to Korea and Japan, where English is treated as a foreign language, Indonesia faces a similar scenario. Consequently, this impacts students' proficiency in English communication as they require additional vocabulary and practice to enhance their learning process.

Students' weak ability to master vocabulary affects their' sentence formation processes in oral and written communication. Most students need help to form simple sentences for everyday conversations. In the case example of research conducted by Linh & Ha (2021), it was found that students who have low vocabulary tend to stop for a moment to think and choose to use English terms. They do not infrequently write sentences in their mother tongue before writing them in English. Therefore, students need help to use English practically in daily communication.

Pre-research findings confirm that students struggle with mastering English vocabulary and show low interest in learning it. Adequate vocabulary skills are crucial at the junior high school level to support language development and future education (Qian & Lin, 2019). However, poor vocabulary proficiency affects students' ability to construct accurate and meaningful sentences, leading to unmet learning outcomes and hindering overall language skills.

This phenomenon needs to get attention from English teachers in Indonesia. It is because teachers with interesting learning strategies and media can help students understand vocabulary and motivate students to participate in learning enthusiastically (Elashhab, 2020; Mauludin, 2021; Muñoz-Restrepo et al., 2020). Therefore, exploring learning strategies that can help students understand English

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vocabulary and concepts is necessary.

In addition, it is crucial to understand the principles of vocabulary teaching identified by Nunan (2023), such as focusing on the most helpful vocabulary, the most appropriate way of teaching, paying attention to high-frequency words, and encouraging students to reflect and be responsible. Take responsibility for the learning. One learning strategy that can be used is the word-mapping strategy, which helps students understand the meaning of words by linking previous knowledge with new concepts being taught (Baumann, 2004). One promising approach to overcome this challenge is through the application of word-mapping learning strategies. Word-mapping is a method in which students use the basic vocabulary they have learned to expand their vocabulary by adding affixes. Thus, this strategy not only helps students to expand their vocabulary, but also deepens their understanding of the structure of the English language, especially in terms of the use of affixes.

Marianca et al. (2022) found that English, as a foreign language in Indonesia, is rarely used in daily communication, making vocabulary acquisition challenging. Their study at SMP Negeri 6 Tondano demonstrated that the word mapping strategy significantly improved students' vocabulary skills. The post-test mean score (81.60) showed notable improvement over the pre-test, supported by a decrease in standard deviation ( $Sdx = 4.94$ ,  $Sdy = 4.59$ ). Using multiple-choice and true-false tests, the study confirmed that word mapping effectively enhances vocabulary learning.

Hidayah et al. (2020) investigated the impact of word mapping on students' vocabulary proficiency using a quasi-experimental design with 10th-grade students at MA Hidayatul Ulum Lampung. The study divided students into experimental and control groups, with the former using word mapping and the latter relying on traditional memorization. Pre-tests and post-tests, consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions, measured vocabulary mastery. Results showed a significant improvement in the experimental group, confirming that word mapping effectively enhances vocabulary acquisition.

Edy and Amiruddin (2019) emphasized the detrimental impact of insufficient vocabulary on students' English comprehension. Their study assessed the effectiveness of employing the word mapping strategy to enhance students' vocabulary proficiency at SMP Negeri 3 Kapontori. Utilizing a Pre-Experimental design, the author focused on students in class VIII during the academic year 2019/2020. Data analysis was conducted using the T-test method. The author findings revealed that the calculated t-value was lower than the critical t-value ( $-13.248 < 2.079$ ). Consequently, implementing the word mapping strategy positively influences students' vocabulary mastery at SMP Negeri 3 Kapontori.

However, the literature on word-mapping strategies in the context of English language learning at the junior high school level still needs to be improved. Most research emphasizes using these strategies to improve vocabulary understanding and rarely explores the specific learning context in junior high school (Edy &

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Amiruddin, 2019; Hakim, 2019; Hidayah et al., 2020). In the meantime, there is no relevant research focused on student responses. Therefore, this study will fill the knowledge gap by exploring how students respond to the use of word-mapping strategies in vocabulary learning for junior high school students.

This research is expected to help identify how EFL junior high school students respond to the implementation of the word-mapping strategy in vocabulary learning by combining an in-depth qualitative approach with a focus on word-mapping strategies.

## **2. Methodology**

The author chose research methodologies by considering the importance of deeper understanding rather than mere practicality (Holden & Lynch, 2006). The author considers the background and research objectives when selecting a methodological approach. In this regard, a qualitative approach was chosen for this research. Because methodology and research problems are interconnected, the validity of research results is greatly influenced by the suitability between the two. By focusing on research questions that explored the student responses, the author chose a case study approach as the author design. The author refers to the case study theory proposed by Yin (2018) to direct this research.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### ***Students Felt Interested in Using Word-Mapping Strategy***

The author's observations showed that students responded to learning with happiness and enjoyment. The results of interviews with research participants also strengthen this finding.

- SA : "I'm happy. I like it because it's fun, and you can find out new things"  
NS : "Happy. I Like it because it's exciting and fun"  
MB : "Happy. I Love it, the class is fun"  
JI : "Happy. I like it because the learning is fun and easy to understand"  
BM : "Happy. I like it because I can learn new vocabulary"  
AK : "Yes, I was very happy and enjoyed the lesson. I like it because it's fun looking for the vocabulary"

This research explores students' affective responses to learning, revealing that most students experience happiness and enjoyment. They find learning fun and interesting, as it allows them to discover new things. These positive emotions enhance student engagement, fostering an enjoyable and meaningful learning environment. This highlights the importance of engaging teaching methods in promoting active participation.

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Positive feelings also influence students' behavior. Observations show that students feel comfortable and actively participate in learning, whether through teacher-led interactions or personal efforts like taking notes. However, some students also experience negative emotions, such as panic and nervousness. This is evident in their expressions and body language, such as sweating or shaking, especially during practice sessions. The struggle with foreign vocabulary adds to their confusion. Interview results further support these observations, reinforcing the impact of both positive and negative affective responses on learning.

However, students felt panicked or nervous during this process. Students' negative feelings during learning can be seen from their expressions and body language. Observations showed that students appeared panicked, sweaty, or shaking, especially when they tended to panic during practice. They look complex and confused when they encounter a lot of foreign vocabulary. Below, the interview result supported the observation result.

- SA : "I feel panicked, then what I do is look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary"  
NS : "I feel unhappy, then what I do is look up the word in the dictionary"  
MB : "I feel bored. I looked at the window."  
JI : "I feel panicked, but the panic is distracted because I look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary"  
BM : "I feel confused, but I still look up the word's meaning in the dictionary."  
AK : "I feel happy, then I look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary"

Some students experience panic when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary. SA and JI reported feeling anxious but used dictionaries to overcome their difficulties. Similarly, NS felt unhappy but still looked up word meanings, showing perseverance despite frustration. BM struggled with boredom and distraction, suggesting that word mapping may require variation to maintain engagement. He also felt confused but continued searching for meanings, demonstrating persistence.

Conversely, AK found vocabulary learning enjoyable, likely due to a sense of accomplishment. Positive emotions like enjoyment boost motivation and engagement, while negative feelings such as panic, dissatisfaction, and boredom can hinder learning if not managed effectively. However, students' use of dictionaries shows their ability to navigate challenges, making word mapping a valuable yet adaptable strategy.

### ***Students Participated Well in Using Word-Mapping Strategy***

From the results of observations, the author found that students had active involvement in behavioural aspects during classroom learning. In the documentation below, students make a presentation regarding their word-mapping results. They explain the meaning of what they are mapping, can be seen in Figure 1.

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Figure 1. Students' Presented Their Mapping

The author found that the results of research observations showed that students also looked happy and comfortable when carrying out group assignments. The interview results also showed relevant findings with the observation findings. Research participants said that they liked learning to write in groups. The following are the author interview results relevant to these findings.

- SA : "I prefer working in a group because it is easier to complete tasks together."  
 NS : "I prefer working in a group because I enjoy working together."  
 MB : "I prefer working in a group because it is fun to meet and discuss with friends."  
 JI : "I prefer working in a group because it is more exciting to exchange ideas."  
 BM : "I prefer working in a group because it makes the task easier."  
 AK : "I prefer working in a group because it gets done faster."

Interview results show that students who like learning and working on assignments in groups prioritize collaboration, fun, and efficiency. They enjoy discussions with friends, the exchange of ideas, and the ease of completing tasks together. This emphasizes the importance of a group-based approach in meeting students' social and academic needs and strengthening their involvement in learning.

In the meantime, as the previous point, the students showed interest in learning vocabulary using a word-mapping strategy. It will support them to be more motivated during the learning process. Students' increasing their motivation will align with their increasing participation in the class. The observation showed it, and the interview results supported the observation result. Please find below the interview results that are relevant to the observation result.

- SA : "I will try to answer the teacher's questions. In the meantime, I also noted the important points."

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- NS : "I try to answer the teacher. and I wrote the important things."  
MB : "I will try to answer, and yes. I wrote some important points"  
JI : "I will try to answer, but I didn't write."  
BM : "I prefer to be silent because I have difficulty mastering English. But, I note the important points down"  
AK : "I will try to answer it. Yes, I will note it down if I find new vocabulary"

Research data reveals variations in student responses to teacher interactions and classroom learning. Most students actively answer questions and take notes, indicating strong engagement and motivation. Positive feelings and involvement contribute to enthusiasm for learning.

However, some students lack motivation and engage in chatter during lessons. Disruptive behavior from students can further distract their concentration, affecting the learning process. The following interview data strengthen the findings of this research.

- SA : "Yes, sometimes it's annoying"  
NS : "Yes, very annoying"  
MB : "Yes, I feel disturbed"  
JI : "Yes, I feel disturbed"  
BM : "It is very disturbing because when the teacher is not there, the class becomes noisy"  
AK : "Yes, very annoying from other friends"

Research data showed that other students' behavioural disturbances during learning disturb the majority of students. Some describe the disturbance as distracting and disrupting their concentration. Student BM highlighted that when the teacher was not there, the class became noisy due to this behaviour. This emphasizes the importance of behaviour management in creating a conducive learning environment.

Disruptive students in class can trigger other students to have negative feelings. As research results show, most students feel disturbed. A conducive class is related to student's concentration. Therefore, some students looked lazy and chatted with other friends while learning. The author results were validated from the following interview data:

- SA : "Yes, a little, I chatted with friends."  
NS : "I feel disturbed, I chatted with friends."  
MB : "I feel bored, I looked at the window."  
JI : "Yes, a little lazy and bored, I looked out the window."  
BM : "A little, I looked out the window."  
AK : "Yes, a bit bored and distrub. When bored, I chat with other friends"

Research data shows that disruptive behavior affects students' motivation, causing boredom, distraction, and off-task conversations. This highlights the need for effective behavior management to maintain a conducive learning environment.

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Additionally, while students generally exhibit positive feelings during learning, they tend to panic during practice sessions. They struggle with foreign vocabulary, appearing confused and overwhelmed, though they do not always show visible signs of panic, such as sweating or shaking. Below the interview result supported observation result.

SA : “I feel panicked, then what I do is look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary”

NS : “I feel unhappy, then what I do is look up the word in the dictionary”

MB : “I feel bored, I looked at the window.”

JI : “I feel panicked, but the panic is distracted because I look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary”

BM : “I feel confused, but I still look up the word's meaning in the dictionary.”

AK : “I feel happy, then I look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary”

Research data revealed that students respond differently to learning new vocabulary. Most experience panic or confusion, but they actively seek word meanings in dictionaries. This behaviour demonstrates a positive learning attitude, showing their determination to overcome challenges and enhance vocabulary comprehension.

### ***Students Understood How to Use Vocabulary in Their Writing***

Research participants also showed that they could understand what was being learned. This is proven by the results of student work as follows:



Figure 2.. Students' Work

Students can understand the use of vocabulary with synonyms that they map from the selected vocabulary. These findings are supported by students' statements in the following interviews.

SA : “It's easier and more fun”

NS : “It's easier to understand and more fun”



JI : “So it's easier to implement the vocabulary. Now, I understand”

AK : “The process of understanding is easier and faster. I love it”

This research highlights the positive impact of word mapping strategies on students' vocabulary learning. Data shows that this approach enhances understanding and engagement. SA finds learning easier and more enjoyable, while NS emphasizes improved vocabulary comprehension. JI notes that word mapping simplifies word usage in context, and AK adds that it accelerates understanding, boosting motivation and satisfaction.

Word mapping helps break down new vocabulary into manageable elements, making learning more structured and engaging. This strategy encourages active participation, creating a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere and increasing motivation. Additionally, it supports students in integrating new vocabulary into daily use more effectively.

## ***Discussion***

### ***Students Felt Interested in Using Word-Mapping Strategy***

In terms of students' affective responses to learning using word mapping strategies, this research reveals that most students show positive feelings towards the learning process, such as happiness and enjoyment. The results of classroom observations and interviews with research participants confirmed that students responded to learning with high enthusiasm and interest. They stated that learning with the word mapping strategy made learning more exciting and fun. This feeling may arise because word mapping strategies allow students to be actively involved in the learning process, giving them control over their learning and facilitating the discovery of new concepts interestingly and interactively. This positive affective response strengthens student engagement in learning and creates a positive classroom atmosphere conducive to meaningful learning. The finding supported by Rainsyah et al., (2023) who found that the word-mapping strategy can engage students' responses in their class, exactly for the affective response. The author was conducted in vocational school. However, the findings showed similar result. Our finding showed that the author participants enjoyed and interested in learning using word-mapping strategy

### ***Students Participated Well in Using Word-Mapping Strategy***

Student behavioural responses in the learning context using word mapping strategies include various interactions and actions carried out by students during the learning process in class. The author results show that most students show active and responsive behaviour during learning. They interact with teachers and classmates, answer questions, and participate in group discussions. Apart from that, students also show proactive behaviour by noting important points during learning. However, some incidents of disruptive behaviour, such as conversations between students, can disrupt study concentration. However, students' behavioural responses generally showed high engagement in learning, although some

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distractions occurred. This finding supported by Pratama and Syafei (2018) who found relevant findings. In their research, they stated that the word-mapping strategy can engage students' behaviour in class. Students were more active in the class, and they showed the interaction between students and teachers in the learning process. Therefore, our findings have the same result. It indicated that the active students in the class showed that students had a good response to the learning.

### ***Students Understood How to Use Vocabulary in Their Writing***

The finding showed that students have good responses in cognitive aspect. Students' cognitive responses were also observed, using various cognitive strategies to answer questions from the teacher and take notes of important points during the learning process. This confirms that students understand the material and develop critical note-taking skills for language acquisition. In addition, fun learning has been shown to increase students' cognitive engagement. When students feel happy and interested, they tend to be more engaged in learning, positively impacting their understanding of the material. Students also confirmed that they could easily understand vocabulary in the context of sentences, indicating the effectiveness of the teaching method in helping them master new vocabulary. Budi, F. L. S., Mulyati, T., & Halim, A. (2021) supported the cognitive finding. Author stated that students can improve their vocabulary using word-mapping strategy in ELT context. It indicated that students' cognitive abilities increased. Increasing vocabulary involves students and can help them gain more confidence when communicating with others. Having a vocabulary correlates with students' English communication ability.

Overall, students' responses to learning to write using the word mapping strategy reflect high involvement in the learning process. Students' affective, behavioural, and cognitive responses are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in creating meaningful and compelling learning experiences. Positive affective responses strengthen student involvement in the learning process, while behavioural and cognitive responses indicate the student's level of engagement and good understanding of the learning material. This confirms that the word mapping strategy effectively increases students' understanding, involvement, and interest in learning to write English.

## **4. Conclusion**

This research reveals the importance of students' affective responses to learning, showing that most students feel happy and enjoy exciting and enjoyable lessons, which motivates them to participate more actively and note important points while learning vocabulary. Although some students reported feelings of panic, dissatisfaction, boredom, and confusion while learning comprehension with word-mapping strategies, they still used dictionaries to overcome these negative feelings and focus on learning new vocabulary and how to use them correctly. Observations also show that students feel comfortable and happy when working

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on group assignments and enjoy collaborating and exchanging ideas with friends. However, disruptive behaviour from classmates can reduce concentration and motivation to learn, including behaviour management's importance in creating a conducive learning environment. Positive affective responses to learning and interesting word mapping strategies can help students process and understand new vocabularies and also encourage students to be actively involved in class participation. However, effective classroom management is still necessary to minimize disruption and maximize the quality of learning.

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