

## An Analysis of Factors Causing Students' Difficulties in Mastering English Vocabulary Through the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SDN Gunung Borok

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the factors contributing to students' difficulties in mastering English vocabulary under the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) at SDN Gunung Borok. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of lesson plans and assignments. Findings reveal that internal factors such as low motivation, limited basic vocabulary, and pronunciation anxiety hinder students' progress. External challenges include traditional memorization-based teaching methods, limited use of learning media, and minimal support from families and the surrounding environment. Although the Independent Curriculum emphasizes flexible, student-centered, and contextual learning, its implementation remains suboptimal due to constraints in teacher training, time, and facilities. The study concludes that enhancing vocabulary mastery requires innovative teaching strategies such as project-based learning, educational games, visual and auditory media, and greater parental involvement. Recommendations include teacher professional development, provision of learning resources, and stronger collaboration between school and home environments.*

**Keywords:** *Vocabulary mastery; Independent Curriculum; student difficulties; elementary education; English learning*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kesulitan siswa dalam menguasai kosakata bahasa Inggris dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di SDN Gunung Borok. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara dengan guru dan siswa, serta dokumentasi rencana pembelajaran dan tugas. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa faktor internal seperti motivasi rendah, keterbatasan kosakata dasar, dan kecemasan pengucapan menghambat kemajuan siswa. Tantangan eksternal meliputi metode pengajaran berbasis hafalan tradisional, terbatasnya penggunaan media pembelajaran, dan minimnya dukungan dari keluarga dan lingkungan sekitar. Meskipun Kurikulum Merdeka menekankan pembelajaran yang fleksibel, berpusat pada siswa, dan kontekstual, implementasinya masih belum optimal karena keterbatasan pelatihan guru, waktu, dan fasilitas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa peningkatan penguasaan kosakata memerlukan strategi pengajaran yang inovatif seperti pembelajaran berbasis proyek, permainan edukatif, media visual dan auditori, serta keterlibatan orang tua yang lebih besar. Rekomendasi yang diberikan meliputi pengembangan profesional guru, penyediaan sumber belajar, dan kolaborasi yang lebih kuat antara lingkungan sekolah dan rumah.

**Kata kunci:** Penguasaan kosakata; Kurikulum Mandiri; kesulitan siswa; pendidikan dasar; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language, widely used in education, technology, and economic fields. In Indonesia, English is introduced from elementary to higher education to prepare students for global challenges. Vocabulary acquisition forms the foundation for mastering the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students struggle to comprehend texts, express ideas, or participate in oral and written communication [1]. At the elementary level, vocabulary mastery is particularly critical, as it supports the gradual development of more complex language competencies [2][4][5]. However, national data from PISA (2022) indicate that approximately 65% of Indonesian elementary students have vocabulary mastery levels below the expected standard. This includes students at SDN Gunung Borok, where vocabulary instruction remains dominated by memorization rather than contextual and project-based approaches.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum was expected to improve these outcomes by promoting personalized, flexible, and contextualized learning. Nonetheless, challenges remain, such as limited teacher preparation, lack of technological resources, and inadequate exposure to English outside school [3] [6]. Additionally, students often experience psychological barriers such as anxiety in pronouncing new vocabulary, further limiting their confidence and participation.

Given these challenges, it is essential to analyze both internal and external factors affecting vocabulary mastery. This study focuses on identifying these factors within the framework of the Independent Curriculum at SDN Gunung Borok. The findings aim to inform the development of more effective teaching strategies and contribute to the broader implementation of student-centered curriculum reform in Indonesia.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. The participants included fifth-grade students and an English teacher at SDN Gunung Borok. The research site was chosen due to its relevance to

the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum.

Data collection techniques included direct classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the English teacher and students, and analysis of supporting documents such as lesson plans, assignments, and vocabulary lists. The instruments used were interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation checklists.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, consisting of three stages: (1) data reduction, by filtering and organizing relevant information; (2) data presentation, using narrative descriptions and tabular formats; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification, through triangulation across multiple data sources to ensure credibility.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings reveal that difficulties in vocabulary mastery stem from both internal and external factors: **Internal Factors:** Students demonstrated low motivation, limited mastery of basic vocabulary [7][8], and anxiety in pronunciation [9][10]. For instance, students expressed fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed, which discouraged active participation [11][12]. **External Factors:** Teachers relied heavily on memorization and drilling, with minimal use of visual or auditory media. Limited facilities and family support also restricted opportunities for reinforcement outside the classroom.

### 3.1 Relation to the Independent Curriculum

While the Independent Curriculum encourages differentiated, project-based, and contextual learning, its implementation at SDN Gunung Borok remains inadequate. Teachers acknowledged awareness of the curriculum's principles but cited barriers such as lack of training, time, and facilities. Consequently, learning remains teacher-centered rather than student-driven.

### 3.2 Innovative Strategies Observed

Some initial attempts at innovation were noted, such as the use of children's songs and picture-based media, which students found more

engaging. These strategies align with literature emphasizing the importance of multisensory and contextual repetition in vocabulary acquisition [4][5].

**Table 1.** Summary of Findings

Factor Type	Key Issues Identified	Relation to Curriculum
Internal	Low motivation, limited vocabulary, pronunciation anxiety	Curriculum principles unmet
External	Traditional teaching methods, lack of media, limited family support	Flexibility not utilized

These findings reinforce the need for training teachers in innovative pedagogy, integrating engaging media, and strengthening parental involvement to align practice with curriculum ideals.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students at SDN Gunung Borok face significant difficulties in mastering English vocabulary due to a combination of internal and external factors. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum, while theoretically supportive of vocabulary learning, has not yet translated into effective practice due to limited teacher readiness, resources, and family support. Enhancing vocabulary mastery requires integrating visual and auditory media, games, songs, project-based tasks, and stronger collaboration between school and home.

#### 5. CLOSING STATEMENT

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