Austronesian: Journal of Language Science & Literature
P-ISSN: 2963-1548 E-ISSN 2961-9947
Journal Homepage:
https://www.ojs.wahanapublikasi.com/index.php/austronesian



The Effect of Using Descriptive Texts from *English for Nusantara* on Seventh-Grade Students' Vocabulary Improvement

Mahyaya Fu'aidah[1*], Amirullah Amirullah[2], Amra Ariyani[3]

[1-3] English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar 90224, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Received:
05 August 2026

Accepted:
03 November 2026

Published:
01 December 2026

Keywords:

Descriptive Texts, *English for Nusantara*, Vocabulary Improvement, Vocabulary Knowledge, Junior High School

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is an essential component of English language learning because it enables students to comprehend texts and express ideas effectively. However, many junior high school students still have limited vocabulary due to insufficient exposure to meaningful learning contexts. This research aimed to determine the effect of using descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook on students' vocabulary improvement. A pre-experimental method with a one-group pre-test and post-test design was employed involving 28 seventh-grade students at UPT SMP Negeri 1 Tamalatea. Data were collected through a vocabulary test consisting of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and word arrangement items measuring the aspects of meaning, use, and form. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and a paired-samples *t*-test. The findings showed that the mean score increased from 37.71 in the pre-test to 73.00 in the post-test. The paired-samples *t*-test also revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($t = -16.289$, $p < .001$). In addition, improvements were found in the aspects of meaning, use, and form. These findings indicate that descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook effectively improve students' vocabulary and can serve as appropriate instructional materials for vocabulary learning at the junior high school level.

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* Corresponding Author: mahyayafuaidah301@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.59011/austronesian.5.3.2026.865-874

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of English language learning because it enables students to comprehend texts, express ideas, and participate effectively in communication. Vocabulary knowledge involves not only memorizing word meanings but also understanding word forms and using words appropriately in different contexts. Webb & Nation (2017) emphasize that vocabulary is acquired more effectively through repeated encounters in meaningful contexts, while Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) highlight the importance of systematic exposure and opportunities to use newly learned words. Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge encompasses multiple dimensions, including receptive and productive abilities (González-Fernández, 2022). Therefore, appropriate instructional materials are essential for supporting students' vocabulary development.

Descriptive texts offer meaningful contexts for vocabulary learning by introducing language related to familiar people, places, objects, and everyday experiences. Such materials help students understand how words function in context, particularly nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2017) argue that instructional materials connected to learners' experiences facilitate meaningful language acquisition. Recent studies also demonstrate the importance of contextual information in vocabulary learning. Chandy et al. (2025) found that contextual diversity influences the processing and incidental learning of unfamiliar vocabulary, while Lim and Lee (2025) identified text type and prior vocabulary knowledge as relevant factors in incidental vocabulary acquisition through reading. Similarly, Ma and Reynolds (2023) demonstrated that reading purposes influence incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention, whereas Wei and Hu (2025) reported improvements in receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge through reading-while-listening activities. These findings emphasize the importance of meaningful and repeated exposure to vocabulary through reading activities.

Vocabulary knowledge itself consists of three interconnected aspects: form, meaning, and use (Nation, 2001). Form concerns the written and spoken representation of words, meaning refers to the concepts associated with lexical items, and use involves their grammatical functions and appropriate application in different contexts. González-Fernández (2022) provides empirical evidence regarding the multidimensional nature of second-language vocabulary knowledge. Likewise, Yuan and Tang (2024) demonstrate that morphological analysis and contextual clue training can support different dimensions of lexical knowledge. These perspectives suggest that vocabulary instruction should address students' ability to recognize, understand, and appropriately use words rather than focus exclusively on memorizing definitions.

In Indonesia, descriptive texts are included in the English for Nusantara textbook, developed to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Chapter 5, entitled This Is My School, introduces descriptions of the school environment and vocabulary related to school facilities, classroom objects, directions, and locations. These familiar topics provide opportunities for students to connect new vocabulary with their everyday experiences. However, preliminary observations and informal interviews with the English teacher at UPT SMP Negeri 1 Tamalatea indicated that many seventh-grade students still experienced difficulties describing places in English. Their vocabulary was generally limited to basic words, making them less confident in participating in descriptive text activities. Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) emphasize that vocabulary development requires repeated exposure and active engagement. Supporting this perspective, Teng (2024) investigated incidental vocabulary learning through different input modes, while Afshar (2021) demonstrated the contribution

of instructional activities focusing on spoken word forms and word components to vocabulary development. These findings highlight the need for contextualized learning activities that provide meaningful exposure and repeated vocabulary practice.

Previous studies have demonstrated the potential of descriptive texts to improve students' vocabulary. Anditasari (2022) found that descriptive texts combined with semantic mapping significantly improved vocabulary mastery. Similarly, Agustina et al. (2019) reported positive vocabulary improvement through descriptive texts supported by Word Wall media, while Emor et al. (2012) demonstrated the effectiveness of semantic mapping in teaching vocabulary through descriptive texts. More recent studies have also highlighted the contribution of reading-based instruction. Arifin and Huy (2025) reported that extensive reading significantly increased EFL students' vocabulary size, while Fitrah et al. (2025) examined its contribution to vocabulary acquisition among junior high school students. Although these studies demonstrate the benefits of reading activities and supplementary instructional strategies, limited attention has been given to the direct use of descriptive texts provided in official national English textbooks.

This situation indicates a research gap concerning the effectiveness of curriculum-based descriptive texts, particularly those included in the English for Nusantara textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, previous research has generally focused on overall vocabulary achievement rather than examining improvements across the specific dimensions of meaning, use, and form. Investigating these dimensions is important to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' vocabulary development.

Therefore, this research investigated the effect of using descriptive texts from Chapter 5 of the English for Nusantara textbook on the vocabulary improvement of seventh-grade students at UPT SMP Negeri 1 Tamalatea. Unlike previous studies that primarily employed supplementary teaching strategies or instructional media, this research utilized descriptive texts from the official textbook as the primary instructional material. Students' vocabulary improvement was examined through three aspects: meaning, use, and form.

2. Literature Review

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of second language acquisition because it supports learners' ability to understand written texts and communicate effectively. Vocabulary knowledge extends beyond memorizing word definitions; it also involves recognizing word forms, understanding meanings, and using words appropriately in different contexts. Nation (2001) conceptualizes vocabulary knowledge through three interconnected dimensions: form, meaning, and use. Form refers to the spoken and written representation of words, meaning concerns the concepts and associations expressed by lexical items, and use involves their grammatical functions and appropriate application in communication. This multidimensional perspective is supported by González-Fernández (2022), who highlights the complexity of second-language vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Schmitt and Schmitt (2020) emphasize that vocabulary development requires systematic exposure and opportunities for learners to use newly acquired words. Webb and Nation (2017) further explain that vocabulary learning is facilitated through repeated encounters with words in meaningful contexts. Therefore, effective vocabulary instruction should provide opportunities for learners to recognize, understand, and apply vocabulary rather than focus solely on memorizing isolated definitions.

Reading materials provide meaningful opportunities for learners to encounter and acquire new vocabulary. In particular, descriptive texts introduce lexical items related to

familiar people, places, objects, and everyday experiences, allowing learners to connect unfamiliar words with recognizable contexts. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2017) argue that instructional materials become more meaningful when they are relevant to learners' experiences and learning needs. Context also plays an important role in vocabulary acquisition. Chandy et al. (2025) demonstrate the influence of contextual diversity on the processing and learning of unfamiliar second-language vocabulary, while Lim and Lee (2025) identify text type and prior vocabulary knowledge as relevant factors in incidental vocabulary learning through reading. Furthermore, Ma and Reynolds (2023) highlight the role of reading purposes in vocabulary acquisition and retention. Wei and Hu (2025) also demonstrate the potential of reading-based activities, particularly reading while listening, to develop receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. These findings suggest that contextualized reading materials, including descriptive texts, can support vocabulary development by exposing learners to words in meaningful language environments. Repeated exposure and focused learning activities may further strengthen learners' recognition and understanding of target vocabulary (Webb, 2007; Teng, 2024).

Several studies have investigated the use of descriptive texts and reading-based activities in vocabulary instruction. Anditasari (2022) reported that the use of descriptive texts combined with semantic mapping improved students' vocabulary mastery. Agustina et al. (2019) similarly found positive vocabulary improvement through descriptive texts supported by Word Wall media, while Emor et al. (2012) demonstrated the contribution of semantic mapping to vocabulary teaching through descriptive texts. Other studies have examined the broader contribution of reading activities to vocabulary development. Arifin and Huy (2025) reported improvements in EFL students' vocabulary size through extensive reading, while Fitrah et al. (2025) investigated the role of extensive reading in vocabulary acquisition among junior high school students. Although these studies provide evidence of the benefits of descriptive texts and reading-based instruction, many have incorporated supplementary strategies or instructional media. Consequently, less attention has been given to the use of descriptive texts provided directly in official national English textbooks, particularly English for Nusantara, as the primary instructional material. In addition, vocabulary improvement has often been examined through overall achievement rather than through the specific dimensions of form, meaning, and use. Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates the effect of using descriptive texts from Chapter 5, This Is My School, of the English for Nusantara textbook on seventh-grade students' vocabulary improvement, with particular attention to the three dimensions of vocabulary knowledge.

3. Method

This research employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental method with a one-group pre-test and post-test design. This design was used to examine the effect of descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook on students' vocabulary improvement by comparing their vocabulary performance before and after the treatment.

The participants were 28 seventh-grade students from Class VII.1 at UPT SMP Negeri 1 Tamalatea, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling based on the English teacher's recommendation because the class still experienced difficulties in English vocabulary learning.

The instrument of this research was a vocabulary test consisting of 30 items developed from Chapter 5, *This Is My School*, of the *English for Nusantara* textbook. The test included three types of items: word arrangement, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the-blank, which assessed three

aspects of vocabulary knowledge proposed by Nation (2001), namely form, meaning, and use. Word arrangement items assessed the form aspect, multiple-choice items assessed the meaning aspect, and fill-in-the-blank items assessed the use aspect. The maximum score of the test was 100.

The research was conducted in three meetings. Before the treatment, the students completed a pre-test to measure their initial vocabulary knowledge. The treatment was then implemented using descriptive texts from Chapter 5 of the *English for Nusantara* textbook. During the treatment, the students participated in contextual learning activities, including reading descriptive texts, identifying vocabulary related to school facilities, completing vocabulary exercises, matching words with pictures, writing simple descriptive texts, and playing vocabulary games. These activities were designed to improve students' understanding of vocabulary meaning, form, and use in meaningful contexts. After the treatment, the students completed a post-test based on the same vocabulary indicators to measure their vocabulary improvement.

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores and standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test. A Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted to examine the normality of the data distribution because the sample consisted of fewer than 50 participants. Since the data were normally distributed, a paired-samples *t*-test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. The level of significance was set at α=.05.

4. Results

The findings are presented through descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to determine the effect of using descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook on students' vocabulary improvement.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Classification	Score	Pre-test *f* (%)	Post-test *f* (%)
Very Good	86–100	0 (0.00)	7 (25.00)
Good	71–85	0 (0.00)	7 (25.00)
Fair	61–70	5 (17.86)	7 (25.00)
Poor	0–60	23 (82.14)	7 (25.00)
Total		**28 (100%)**	**28 (100%)**

Before the treatment, most students (82.14%) were classified in the Poor category, while none achieved the Good or Very Good categories. After the treatment, the number of students in the Poor category decreased considerably, whereas the proportions of students in the Fair, Good, and Very Good categories increased. These findings indicate an overall improvement in students' vocabulary performance following the treatment.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Test	*N*	Mean	SD
Pre-test	28	37.71	18.30
Post-test	28	73.00	15.69

As presented in Table 2, the mean score increased from 37.71 in the pre-test to 73.00 in the post-test, with a mean difference of 35.29 points. Furthermore, the standard deviation

decreased from 18.30 to 15.69, indicating that students' scores became more consistent after the treatment. This finding suggests that vocabulary improvement was experienced by most students rather than only by a small number of participants.

Before testing the research hypothesis, the normality of the data was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test.

Table 3. Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test

Test	*p*	Interpretation
Pre-test	.063	Normal
Post-test	.296	Normal

The Shapiro–Wilk test showed significance values greater than .05 for both the pre-test and post-test, indicating that the data were normally distributed. Therefore, the assumptions for conducting a paired-samples *t*-test were satisfied.

Table 4. Paired-Samples *t*-Test

Mean Difference	*t*	*df*	*p*
-35.29	-16.289	27	< .001

The paired-samples *t*-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($t = -16.289$, $df = 27$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, indicating that the use of descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook had a significant positive effect on students' vocabulary improvement.

Table 5. Students' Vocabulary Improvement in Each Aspect

Vocabulary Aspect	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference
Meaning	6.14	8.21	2.07
Use	2.93	5.64	2.71
Form	2.43	6.64	4.21

As presented in Table 5, all three aspects of vocabulary knowledge improved after the treatment. The greatest improvement was found in the form aspect, with a mean difference of 4.21, followed by use (2.71) and meaning (2.07). Overall, these findings demonstrate that the use of descriptive texts contributed to improvements in students' vocabulary knowledge across all assessed aspects.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrated that the use of descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook had a significant positive effect on students' vocabulary improvement. This result was evidenced by the increase in the mean score from 37.71 in the pre-test to 73.00 in the post-test, as well as the paired-samples *t*-test result, which indicated a statistically significant difference between the two tests ($t = -16.289$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that descriptive texts provide meaningful learning experiences that support vocabulary development through contextual language exposure.

The effectiveness of descriptive texts can be attributed to the contextual nature of the learning materials. The descriptive texts used in this research presented topics closely related to students' daily experiences, particularly the school environment. Such familiar contexts

enabled students to connect newly learned vocabulary with objects, places, and situations they encountered in everyday life, making vocabulary learning more meaningful. According to Nation and Webb (2017), learners acquire vocabulary more effectively when they repeatedly encounter words in meaningful contexts rather than through isolated memorization. Likewise, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2017) argue that instructional materials closely related to learners' experiences facilitate meaningful language learning because learners are able to connect new information with their existing knowledge. Therefore, the contextual characteristics of the descriptive texts likely contributed to the students' vocabulary improvement.

An additional finding of this research was that students demonstrated improvement in all three aspects of vocabulary knowledge, namely meaning, use, and form. However, the degree of improvement differed across the three aspects. The form aspect showed the greatest improvement, followed by use and meaning. These findings indicate that descriptive texts contributed to vocabulary development across multiple dimensions rather than merely increasing the number of words learned.

The improvement in the meaning aspect indicates that students became more capable of understanding the meanings of unfamiliar words after learning through descriptive texts. The contextual information provided in the texts helped students infer word meanings more effectively than learning isolated vocabulary lists. This finding supports Nation's (2001) view that vocabulary learning is strengthened when learners understand the relationship between words and the contexts in which they are used.

The use aspect also showed considerable improvement, suggesting that students became better able to apply vocabulary appropriately in contextual activities. Throughout the treatment, students completed vocabulary exercises, participated in classroom discussions, and wrote simple descriptive texts using the target vocabulary. These activities provided opportunities for students to practice vocabulary in meaningful situations rather than simply memorizing individual words. As a result, students developed a better understanding of how vocabulary functions in communication.

The greatest improvement occurred in the form aspect. This finding indicates that students became more proficient in recognizing correct spelling and word forms after participating in the learning activities. One possible explanation is that students repeatedly encountered and practiced the target vocabulary through reading activities, word arrangement exercises, vocabulary games, and descriptive writing tasks. Repeated exposure enabled students to become more familiar with the orthographic forms of the target words, thereby improving their ability to recognize and produce them accurately. This finding is consistent with Nation (2001), who emphasizes that knowledge of word form is an essential component of vocabulary knowledge, and with Webb (2007), who argues that repeated encounters with vocabulary contribute significantly to learners' vocabulary acquisition.

The findings of this research are generally consistent with previous studies. Anditasari (2022) reported that descriptive texts significantly improved students' vocabulary through semantic mapping, while Agustina et al. (2019) found that descriptive texts integrated with Word Wall media positively affected vocabulary learning. Similarly, Emor et al. (2012) demonstrated that descriptive texts supported by semantic mapping enhanced students' vocabulary achievement. Although these studies employed additional instructional strategies, the present research demonstrates that descriptive texts contained in the *English for Nusantara* textbook can effectively improve students' vocabulary even when used as the primary instructional material. This finding provides additional empirical evidence

supporting the effectiveness of curriculum-based instructional materials for vocabulary instruction in Indonesian junior high schools.

Despite these positive findings, this research has several limitations. First, the use aspect of vocabulary was assessed using fill-in-the-blank items, which may not fully represent students' productive vocabulary use in authentic communication. Second, the treatment was conducted in only three meetings due to limited instructional time before the end of the semester. Consequently, the duration of the intervention may not have been sufficient to capture students' long-term vocabulary development. Future research is therefore recommended to employ more authentic assessment tasks, such as sentence construction, paragraph writing, or oral production activities, and to implement a longer treatment period to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' vocabulary improvement.

The findings of this research demonstrate that descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook provide meaningful and contextual learning experiences that significantly improve students' vocabulary. The results also support the use of curriculum-based descriptive texts as effective instructional materials for vocabulary teaching, particularly in the context of Indonesian junior high schools.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that the use of descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook had a significant positive effect on the vocabulary improvement of seventh-grade students at UPT SMP Negeri 1 Tamalatea. The statistical analysis confirmed that students' vocabulary improved significantly after the implementation of the treatment, demonstrating that descriptive texts provided meaningful and contextual learning experiences that effectively supported vocabulary development.

The improvement was evident across all three assessed aspects of vocabulary knowledge, namely meaning, use, and form. Among these aspects, the greatest improvement occurred in the form aspect, followed by use and meaning. These findings suggest that descriptive texts not only helped students understand word meanings but also improved their ability to recognize word forms and use vocabulary appropriately in context. Therefore, descriptive texts from the *English for Nusantara* textbook can be considered effective instructional materials for vocabulary instruction at the junior high school level.

Based on these findings, English teachers are encouraged to integrate descriptive texts into vocabulary instruction through contextual learning activities that actively engage students with new vocabulary. Future research is recommended to employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs with larger samples and longer treatment periods, as well as more authentic assessment tasks, such as writing and speaking activities, to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of students' vocabulary development.

Funding
This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions
Mahyaya Fu'aidah: Investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and writing – original draft.

Amirullah Amirullah: Supervision, conceptualization, and methodology.
Amra Ariyani: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.
All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Statement of the Use of AI

AI-assisted tools were used solely to support the translation of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and verified the translated content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

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