A Qualitative Study on Perceptions of the Drill Method in Learning Vocabulary: Arabic and English Language

Muhamad Safrodin[1], Ahmad Thoriqul Falah[2], Chiedu Eseadi[3]

[1, 2] *Universitas Kiai Abdullah Faqih Gresik, Indonesia*
[3] *University of Johannesburg, South Africa*

A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the use of the drill method in vocabulary acquisition for both Arabic and English at Mambaus Sholihin 9 Islamic Boarding School in Blitar. The research involved 41 intermediate-level students and five teachers who consistently applied the drill method in their language instruction. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), then analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and insights. The results reveal that the drill method significantly enhances vocabulary retention, with 32 out of 41 students reporting better recall of vocabulary items in both languages. Teachers affirmed the method's effectiveness, particularly in reinforcing vocabulary patterns and structures, especially for Arabic, where root-based morphology benefits from repetition. Nine students expressed difficulty maintaining concentration due to the monotonous nature of the drills, indicating the need for more varied instructional strategies. Moreover, the study highlights key differences between the two languages: Arabic learners benefitted from drills focusing on morphological roots and derivational patterns, while English learners required more contextualized usage examples due to the language's irregularities and idiomatic expressions. To address these issues, the study recommends incorporating creative variations such as games, role-playing, group competitions, and contextual sentence construction. Additionally, differentiated drills tailored to students' proficiency levels and the unique structural features of each language are essential. The findings contribute valuable insights for improving bilingual vocabulary instruction, supporting more engaging and effective pedagogical approaches in Islamic boarding school contexts and similar educational environments.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi siswa dan guru terhadap penggunaan metode drill dalam pemerolehan kosakata bahasa Arab dan bahasa Inggris di Pondok Pesantren Mambaus Sholihin 9 Blitar. Penelitian ini melibatkan 41 siswa tingkat menengah dan lima orang guru yang secara konsisten menerapkan metode drill dalam pengajaran bahasa. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan diskusi kelompok terarah (FGD), lalu dianalisis dengan analisis tematik untuk menemukan pola dan wawasan yang berulang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa metode drill secara signifikan meningkatkan daya ingat kosakata, dengan 32 dari 41 siswa melaporkan peningkatan kemampuan mengingat kosakata dalam kedua bahasa. Para guru juga menegaskan efektivitas metode ini, khususnya dalam memperkuat pola dan struktur kosakata, terutama pada bahasa Arab yang morfologinya berbasis akar kata dan sangat diuntungkan dengan pengulangan. Namun, sembilan siswa menyatakan kesulitan dalam menjaga konsentrasi akibat sifat repetitif yang monoton dari metode ini, sehingga diperlukan strategi pengajaran yang lebih bervariasi. Selain itu, penelitian ini menyoroti perbedaan mendasar antara kedua bahasa: pembelajar bahasa Arab memperoleh manfaat dari latihan yang menekankan pada akar morfologis dan pola turunan kata, sementara pembelajar bahasa Inggris membutuhkan contoh penggunaan yang lebih kontekstual karena ketidakteraturan dan ekspresi idiomatis dalam bahasa tersebut. Untuk mengatasi tantangan ini, studi ini merekomendasikan variasi kreatif seperti permainan, bermain peran, kompetisi kelompok, dan konstruksi kalimat kontekstual. Drill yang disesuaikan dengan tingkat kemampuan

siswa serta karakteristik struktural masing-masing bahasa juga sangat penting. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan berharga dalam meningkatkan pengajaran kosakata dwibahasa dan mendukung pendekatan pedagogis yang lebih menarik dan efektif di lingkungan pesantren maupun lembaga pendidikan serupa.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is a crucial component of language learning, forming the basis for effective communication and comprehension. Arabic and English, as two linguistically distinct languages, present unique challenges for learners. Arabic, with its root-based morphology and derivational patterns, often demands an understanding of word formation that is systematic and structured (Elgin, 2008). Conversely, English vocabulary learning involves navigating irregularities and a high level of lexical borrowing, which requires exposure to diverse word usages (Nation, 2001).

The drill method, which emphasizes repetitive practice and reinforcement, has been widely employed in vocabulary learning. Grounded in behaviorist theories, this method focuses on habit formation through structured repetition, aiming to enhance learners' retention of vocabulary items (Skinner, 1957). While numerous studies have evaluated its effectiveness quantitatively, less attention has been given to how learners and educators perceive its utility and applicability in language learning contexts (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Perceptions of teaching methods significantly influence their success in classroom settings. Learners' attitudes toward a method can affect their motivation and engagement, while educators' views play a critical role in its implementation (Pajares, 1992). Despite the widespread use of the drill method, understanding of how it is perceived in teaching two structurally diverse languages — Arabic and English — remains limited (Littlewood, 1981).

This study delves into the perceptions of students and educators regarding the drill method in learning Arabic and English vocabulary through a qualitative approach. Utilizing interviews and focus group discussions, the research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how this method is received and its impact on vocabulary acquisition. Specifically, the study addresses three central questions: How do students perceive the effectiveness of the drill method in mastering vocabulary? What are the advantages and challenges of this method as viewed by educators? And how do linguistic and contextual factors shape these perceptions? By examining these questions, the research aims to shed light on the experiences of learners and teachers, identifying both the strengths and limitations of the drill method. Additionally, the study investigates how structural differences between Arabic and English, along with contextual learning environments, influence attitudes towards this approach, ultimately contributing to a broader discussion on pedagogical strategies in language education.

The overarching goal of this research is to explore the effectiveness and applicability of the drill method in vocabulary learning, offering insights into its role within language instruction. By engaging with students and educators, the study seeks to determine the extent to which the drill method enhances retention and comprehension while also uncovering potential drawbacks that may hinder learning outcomes. The findings aim to provide a balanced perspective on whether repetitive drills serve as a beneficial tool or pose challenges that require pedagogical adjustments. Furthermore, the study examines how different linguistic structures impact the reception of the drill method, assessing whether learners of Arabic and English experience distinct cognitive or practical difficulties.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perceptions of students and teachers on the drill method for vocabulary acquisition in Arabic and English. A phenomenological approach was chosen, as it focuses on understanding participants' lived experiences and the meanings

they assign to those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This design was deemed appropriate for capturing the subjective views of individuals involved in teaching and learning vocabulary in two distinct linguistic contexts. The research was conducted at Mambaus Sholihin 9 Islamic Boarding School in Blitar, a language-focused Islamic boarding school. A total of 46 participants were involved in the study, comprising 41 students who were actively engaged in vocabulary learning for Arabic and English, and 5 teachers who implemented the drill method in their teaching practices. The students were selected from intermediate-level classes to ensure their familiarity with the drill method. Teachers included in the study had varying levels of teaching experience, but all had applied the drill method regularly in their instruction.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met the criteria relevant to the research objectives. This sampling approach facilitated the inclusion of diverse perspectives, enriching the depth and reliability of the data collected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Conducted with the 5 teachers to explore their perceptions of the drill method, its challenges, and its perceived effectiveness in teaching vocabulary. Each interview lasted approximately 5–7 minutes, allowing for in-depth exploration of individual experiences. Conducted with the 41 students, divided into smaller groups of 5–6 participants. FGDs encouraged dynamic interactions, revealing collective attitudes and contrasting perspectives. Discussions were guided by a semi-structured framework to maintain focus while allowing flexibility for participants to share their views freely.

All data collection sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent, then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness. Given the focus on understanding perceptions, Thematic Analysis was employed as the primary method of data analysis. This approach involved systematically identifying and interpreting themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed these steps:

1. Familiarization

Reading and re-reading transcripts to gain an initial understanding of the data.

2. Coding

Identifying key phrases and concepts related to participants' views on the drill method.

3. Theme Development

Grouping codes into broader categories or themes, such as *effectiveness of repetition*, *challenges in implementation*, and *language-specific perceptions*.

4. Interpretation

Analyzing the themes in relation to the research questions and contextual factors of the study site.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, several measures were taken:

➢ Member Checking: Preliminary findings were shared with participants to validate the accuracy of interpretations.

➢ Triangulation: Data from interviews and FGDs were cross-verified to ensure consistency and enrich insights.

➢ Peer Debriefing: Findings and interpretations were discussed with peers to minimize bias and improve analytical rigor.

Ethical approval was obtained before the commencement of the study. All participants were informed of the research objectives, their rights to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality measures in place to protect their identities. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. By employing this research design and methodological approach, the study aimed to

uncover rich insights into the perceptions of the drill method, contributing to a better understanding of its application in bilingual vocabulary acquisition.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The findings from the semi-structured interviews with five teachers reveal a strong consensus on the effectiveness of the drill method in vocabulary acquisition, particularly in reinforcing long-term retention. All five teachers unanimously agreed that repetitive practice plays a crucial role in helping students internalize vocabulary, with one educator emphasizing that "drilling ensures students remember words long-term, especially when paired with sentence examples." This perspective was further supported by student feedback gathered through focus group discussions, in which 32 out of 41 students expressed positive views on the drill method. These students highlighted how repetition strengthened their recall and comprehension of both Arabic and English vocabulary, making it easier to retrieve words in various contexts. The findings suggest that despite variations in teaching styles and student learning preferences, the drill method remains a widely accepted and beneficial technique for vocabulary learning. However, this method's success is not merely attributed to repetition alone but also to the strategic implementation that considers linguistic structures, cognitive engagement, and instructional variety.

Despite the overwhelming support for the drill method, some challenges emerged, particularly concerning student engagement and motivation. A minority of students (9 out of 41) reported that repetitive drills often became monotonous, making it difficult to maintain focus. One student remarked, "Sometimes, I lose focus during repetitive drills, especially after long sessions," highlighting the potential drawback of over-reliance on rote repetition. This aligns with concerns raised by three of the interviewed teachers, who identified sustaining student interest as a major challenge. Without variation in activities, students may perceive drills as tedious and disengaging, ultimately diminishing their effectiveness. Additionally, differences in student proficiency levels further complicated the implementation of drills. In focus group discussions, high-performing students felt that drills were too elementary and lacked intellectual stimulation, whereas lower-performing students found them too fast-paced, leading to frustration and difficulty in keeping up. This disparity indicates that while the drill method is effective, its rigid structure may not cater equally to all learners, necessitating modifications that address different learning speeds and engagement levels.

Another crucial aspect emerging from the findings is the differential effectiveness of the drill method in learning Arabic versus English vocabulary. Both teachers and students noted that drills appeared to be more effective for Arabic due to the language's unique morphological structure, which relies on root patterns and derivational consistency. One teacher explained, "Arabic vocabulary requires pattern recognition, and drills reinforce these patterns better," suggesting that repeated exposure to word roots and affixes enhances comprehension and recall in a systematic way. On the other hand, English vocabulary acquisition presented distinct challenges. While students acknowledged that drills improved their spelling and pronunciation, many found that drills alone were insufficient for grasping contextual usage and nuanced meanings. Three teachers echoed this concern, recommending that English vocabulary instruction integrate contextual examples, sentence-building exercises, and conversational practice alongside drills to create a more comprehensive learning experience. These insights suggest that while drilling is a foundational technique in both languages, its effectiveness depends on linguistic structures and the extent to which contextual learning is incorporated.

In light of these findings, the study underscores the importance of refining drill-based teaching strategies to maximize student engagement and learning outcomes. Rather than relying solely on mechanical repetition, educators should consider integrating complementary methods such as interactive exercises, gamification, and real-life applications to sustain interest and enhance

comprehension. Additionally, tailoring drills to accommodate different proficiency levels can ensure that all students benefit from the method without feeling overwhelmed or under-challenged. For Arabic instruction, maintaining a strong emphasis on root patterns and morphological structures appears to be beneficial, while for English, combining drills with communicative and contextual learning approaches can lead to greater language proficiency. Ultimately, these findings contribute to the broader discourse on effective bilingual education strategies, emphasizing the need for adaptive and student-centered instructional methodologies that balance repetition with meaningful engagement.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature emphasizing the role of repetition in language acquisition, particularly in the transition of vocabulary from short-term to long-term memory (Schmidt et al., 2019). The effectiveness of the drill method, as reported by 32 out of 41 students, underscores its value in reinforcing vocabulary retention (Andrä et al., 2020). This supports the argument presented by Nation (2001), who asserted that repeated exposure to words enhances retrieval and recall. However, the study also highlights potential drawbacks, as 9 students reported experiencing monotony during repetitive drills. This concern aligns with Harmer's (2007) observation that excessive repetition without variation can lead to disengagement, ultimately diminishing the effectiveness of the method. The challenge, therefore, lies not in the principle of repetition itself but in its implementation. The findings suggest that while drilling is an effective learning tool, its rigid and repetitive nature can hinder engagement if not paired with creative instructional strategies. To address this, teachers must explore innovative ways to integrate repetition into learning activities that maintain student interest while still reinforcing vocabulary acquisition (Maguire et al., 2018).

The issue of maintaining student engagement within the drill method highlights the necessity of differentiated instruction (Yilmaz et al., 2022), particularly in bilingual learning environments. Teachers in this study employed various strategies to tailor drills to students' proficiency levels, acknowledging that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective. This finding is consistent with Tomlinson's (2014) argument that differentiated instruction is essential for optimizing the benefits of any teaching method. High-performing students in the study expressed that standard drills often felt too basic, while lower-performing students struggled to keep pace with the exercises (Goossens et al., 2016). This discrepancy suggests that structured variation is crucial, allowing students to engage with vocabulary exercises that align with their individual learning needs. Some teachers in the study addressed this issue by modifying drills with interactive elements such as peer collaboration and adaptive difficulty levels, thereby ensuring that both advanced and struggling learners benefited from the method (Karras, 2016). The findings reinforce the idea that while repetition aids memory, the method's success depends on the extent to which it accommodates diverse learning styles and proficiencies.

Another significant insight from the study is the differing perceptions of the drill method's effectiveness between Arabic and English vocabulary learning. The root-based structure of Arabic makes it particularly well-suited for drills, as repeated exposure to word patterns helps reinforce morphological recognition. One teacher emphasized this point by stating that "Arabic vocabulary requires pattern recognition, and drills reinforce these patterns effectively." This observation aligns with research on Arabic language acquisition, which highlights the importance of recognizing root structures in vocabulary retention. In contrast, students and teachers found that English vocabulary learning required additional contextualization due to its irregular spelling patterns and nuanced meanings (van der Veen et al., 2016). The findings support Nation's (2001) argument that vocabulary teaching methods must account for linguistic differences, as language-specific adaptations can enhance instructional effectiveness. In the case of Arabic, drilling may be most effective when structured around root-based patterns, while for English (Gorgoz & Tican, 2020), contextual examples and sentence integration may be necessary to ensure deeper comprehension. This distinction

underscores the need for educators to adopt a flexible approach that considers the unique characteristics of each language when applying the drill method.

To optimize the effectiveness of the drill method for bilingual vocabulary acquisition, this study recommends incorporating structured variations that maintain engagement while reinforcing learning (Silverman et al., 2019). Strategies such as interactive games, group activities, and contextual sentence construction can mitigate the monotony associated with repetitive drills. Additionally, differentiated instruction should be employed to ensure that drills cater to students with varying proficiency levels, preventing frustration among struggling learners and boredom among advanced students (McDonald et al., 2024). For Arabic vocabulary instruction, a continued emphasis on root-based patterns is advisable, whereas English vocabulary acquisition may benefit from more context-driven approaches (Goldstein et al., 2017). By tailoring the drill method to both language structures and student needs, educators can create a more dynamic and effective learning environment. These recommendations, derived from interview responses and focus group discussions, provide a framework for refining vocabulary instruction in bilingual settings, ensuring that the drill method remains an engaging and impactful tool for language learning.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the drill method serves as a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition in a bilingual learning environment, yet its overall success hinges on careful implementation that takes into account both pedagogical strategies and learner engagement. While students and educators recognize the benefits of repetition in reinforcing memory retention and language recall, they also highlight the inherent challenges of the method, particularly the risk of monotony and disengagement if not complemented with interactive and contextualized learning experiences. Moreover, the study underscores that the effectiveness of the drill method varies depending on linguistic factors specific to Arabic and English. Arabic, with its root-based morphology and complex verb structures, may require tailored drill exercises that emphasize word patterns and contextual application, whereas English, with its relatively flexible syntactic structures, benefits from drills that focus on collocations and usage in diverse contexts. Additionally, student motivation and prior language exposure play crucial roles in determining the efficacy of this approach. Without incorporating strategies that maintain learner interest, such as gamification, real-world application, or multimodal reinforcement, the risk of cognitive fatigue and passive learning increases. This indicates that while the drill method remains a fundamental aspect of vocabulary instruction, its impact is maximized when integrated into a more dynamic and interactive pedagogical framework that aligns with contemporary language learning theories.

Beyond its immediate implications for vocabulary acquisition, the study contributes to a broader discourse on bilingual education by highlighting the need for instructional strategies that are adaptable to diverse linguistic and cognitive needs. The findings suggest that while rote learning and repetition have long been cornerstones of language education, their effectiveness in a bilingual setting is contingent upon the ability of educators to balance repetition with meaningful language exposure and comprehension-based activities. In bilingual contexts, where students simultaneously acquire multiple linguistic systems, it is essential to ensure that drilling exercises do not merely promote rote memorization but also facilitate deeper linguistic competence, including syntactic flexibility, semantic awareness, and cross-linguistic transfer. Moreover, educators must consider cultural and contextual factors when designing vocabulary drills, ensuring that learning materials are relevant and engaging to students' everyday experiences. By doing so, they can create a learning environment where vocabulary acquisition is not only systematic but also meaningful and enduring. Ultimately, the study's insights reinforce the importance of pedagogical innovation in bilingual education, advocating for an approach that blends structured repetition with communicative and experiential learning strategies. By refining the way vocabulary drills are implemented, educators can enhance language proficiency in ways that are both effective and engaging, thereby strengthening the overall quality of bilingual instruction.

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