



**COMPARING CONTENT AND PARALINGUISTIC CUES IN
ENHANCING VOCABULARY RETENTION ACROSS DIFFERENT
THEMES AMONG YOUNG LEARNERS**

THESIS

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM MALANG

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ABSTRACT

Agustini, Sri. 2025. *Comparing Content and Paralinguistic Cues In Enhancing Vocabulary Retention Across Different Themes Among Young Learners* Thesis, English Language Education Study Program, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Islam Malang. Advisor: (I) Dr. Dra. Mutmainnah Mustofa, M.Pd. (II) Dr. Dzul Fikri, S.S., M.Pd.

Keywords: vocabulary retention, verbal plus content related nonverbal, verbal plus paralinguistic related nonverbal, young learners, vocabulary themes.

This study explored the use of two types of instructional cues in vocabulary teaching verbal plus content-related nonverbal cues, and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues and how these cues affected vocabulary retention among young learners. This study also aimed to examine young learners' vocabulary retention based on two themes: profession and physical appearance.

The study employed a pre-experimental design with a within-subject repeated measures design involving 35 lower-grade elementary school students, who experienced both types of instructional cues. Vocabulary retention was measured using pre-tests and post-tests, while classroom observations were conducted to examine students' engagement during the learning process. These instruments were used to triangulate data and provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the students' responses to each instructional cue. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 20 to compare the two instructional cues and vocabulary themes, while observation data supported the interpretation of learning behaviors.

The results showed that paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and intonation were associated with higher levels of vocabulary retention and students' engagement compared to content-related cues like using pictures. It can be said that verbal plus paralinguistic related nonverbal was more effective than verbal plus content related nonverbal. Students appeared more attentive, responsive, and confident when exposed to dynamic and expressive cues. Additionally, vocabulary related to professions was more easily retained than physical appearance, possibly due to its familiarity and more concrete representations.

These findings suggest that multimodal instructional strategies and interactive instructional cues, especially those involving embodied communication provide meaningful support for vocabulary learning among young

learners. The insights from this study can inform educators in designing contextually engaging and developmentally appropriate vocabulary instruction.



ABSTRAK

Agustini, Sri. 2025. *Comparing Content and Paralinguistic Cues In Enhancing Vocabulary Retention Across Different Themes Among Young Learners* Thesis, English Language Education Study Program, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Islam Malang. Advisor: (I) Dr. Dra. Mutmainnah Mustofa, M.Pd. (II) Dr. Dzul Fikri, S.S., M.Pd.

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Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan dua jenis petunjuk instruksional dalam pengajaran kosakata, yaitu petunjuk verbal ditambah petunjuk nonverbal yang berkaitan dengan konten, dan petunjuk verbal ditambah petunjuk nonverbal yang berkaitan dengan paralinguistik, serta bagaimana petunjuk-petunjuk ini memengaruhi retensi kosakata di kalangan pelajar muda. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk menganalisis retensi kosakata pelajar muda berdasarkan dua tema: profesi dan penampilan fisik.

Penelitian ini menggunakan desain pra-eksperimental dengan desain pengukuran berulang pada subjek yang sama, melibatkan 35 siswa sekolah dasar kelas bawah yang mengalami kedua jenis petunjuk instruksional. Retensi kosakata diukur menggunakan tes pre-test dan post test, sementara pengamatan di kelas dilakukan untuk menganalisis tingkat keterlibatan siswa selama proses belajar. Instrumen ini digunakan untuk mengintegrasikan data dan memberikan wawasan kuantitatif dan kualitatif tentang respons siswa terhadap masing-masing petunjuk instruksional. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan SPSS 20 untuk membandingkan kedua petunjuk instruksional dan tema kosakata, sementara data observasi mendukung interpretasi perilaku belajar.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa isyarat nonverbal yang terkait dengan paralinguistik, seperti gerakan tubuh, ekspresi wajah, dan intonasi, terkait dengan tingkat retensi kosakata yang lebih tinggi dan tingkat keterlibatan siswa dibandingkan dengan isyarat nonverbal yang terkait dengan konten, seperti penggunaan gambar. Dapat dikatakan bahwa kombinasi verbal ditambah isyarat nonverbal yang terkait dengan paralinguistik lebih efektif daripada kombinasi verbal ditambah isyarat nonverbal yang terkait dengan konten. Siswa tampak lebih perhatian, responsif, dan percaya diri saat terpapar isyarat yang dinamis dan ekspresif. Selain itu, kosakata yang berkaitan dengan profesi lebih mudah diingat daripada kosakata yang berkaitan dengan penampilan fisik, kemungkinan karena kemiripannya dan representasi yang lebih konkret.

Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi pengajaran multimodal dan petunjuk pengajaran interaktif, terutama yang melibatkan komunikasi yang melibatkan tubuh, memberikan dukungan yang berarti bagi pembelajaran kosakata di kalangan siswa muda. Temuan dari studi ini dapat memberikan wawasan bagi pendidik dalam merancang pengajaran kosakata yang menarik secara kontekstual dan sesuai dengan perkembangan siswa.



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background of the study that underlies the importance of this research is discussed, including the relevance of the topic to the context of English language learning in elementary school students or young learners. In addition, this chapter also outlines the research questions, research objectives, hypothesis, significance of the study, and scope and limitations. Accordingly, the discussion in this chapter provides a framework for understanding the main focus of the study, which is related to the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal instructional cues in vocabulary learning.

1.1 Background of the Study

One of the first steps in learning language is learning words, also known as vocabulary (Triyogo & Syaprizal, 2019). Vocabulary is the main component of a language, which should be the starting point for language learning so that the language can be acquired. Therefore, an individual's success in learning a new language is highly dependent on their vocabulary. In recent years, many studies have focused on learning vocabulary and reported that vocabulary must be prioritized for learning a new language (Amiryousefi & Ketabi 2011; Leong et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2020; Mansoor et al., 2023). Therefore, vocabulary plays a crucial role in expressing ideas. Besides, vocabulary can be expressed through both written and oral language. Having a wide range of vocabulary can help students to read and understand the textual sources, e.g., books, articles, essays, etc. According to Teng et al. (2024), a robust vocabulary is essential for effective

communication and academic success across various disciplines. It can also help students obtain information from news media. Vocabulary knowledge also affects students' academic progress since it influences how well they grasp texts used as reading assignments and classroom activities (Saleh & Althaqafi, 2022; Aziz et al., 2024). Vocabulary acquisition also helps students to maintain a good interaction that affects their social network. The more vocabulary students have, the better they communicate with their interlocutors. Rizky Setiawan and Wiedarti (2020), as cited in Dewi et al. (2023), stated that vocabulary can be defined as the words that someone must know to communicate effectively. It can be said that vocabulary refers to the set of words a person needs to understand and use for effective communication.

When learning vocabulary, various factors can affect students' ability to learn and remember new words effectively. One of the most important factors is the instructional strategy employed, as the way the material is delivered can have a significant impact on the success of the learning process. Students who have been trained to use interactive reading strategies demonstrated increased vocabulary and character recognition (Chow et al., 2008, as cited in Xiao et al., 2024). Teachers often give up teaching pronunciation and discrimination because they lack support in teaching methods and lack training (Darcy, 2018; Geron & Billerey, 2020, Chapuis & Berthele, 2024). Peters (2019) found that target words supplemented by imagery from the input have a significantly higher likelihood to be learned than those without imagery, which raises an important question regarding the role of the nonverbal element within multimodal input in facilitating

vocabulary learning. Several studies have shown the use of different approaches, including combining different types of input, can improve students' retention of the vocabulary learned. It can be concluded that using multimodal instructional strategies that are not only based on spoken or written language but also include other elements, such as visual or hands-on experiences related to the vocabulary. A more contextualized approach allows students to connect new words with a deeper understanding and reinforce vocabulary learning over time. In other words, teaching a variety of vocabulary based on students' experiences promotes more meaningful learning and accelerates the memory process.

In vocabulary learning, however, traditional teaching approaches often rely on verbal input only, which may not fully support the complex process of vocabulary retention. Studies have shown that using multimodal instructional strategies, which combine verbal language with nonverbal, significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition by making the learning process more engaging and memorable. Multimedia input can assist learners in creating referential linkages between two types of mental representation systems: verbal and visual ones (Ramezanali, Uchihara, and Faez 2021; Yoshii and Flaitz 2002; Teng 2023). Nonverbal cues, such as gestures, images, and tone of voice, provide additional context that helps learners grasp word meanings and retain them longer. These paralinguistic elements contribute to what is termed “contextualized learning,” wherein learners connect vocabulary with real-world situations, and improve their understanding and recall.

Previous research by Zhang and Zhang (2024) highlights the effectiveness of combining verbal cues with nonverbal cues that are either content-related or paralinguistic. For instance, verbal only, and content-related nonverbal cues, such as images or videos depicting the vocabulary item, give learners a direct visual reference that strengthens memory. On the other hand, paralinguistic cues, including gestures, tone, and facial expressions, add emotional or relational meaning, helping learners create a stronger association with the vocabulary being taught. The findings of these studies suggest that both multimodal input are valuable in aiding vocabulary retention, especially in helping foreign language learners learn more demanding, productive vocabulary knowledge, although there is limited exploration into their relative effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary learning in young learners, especially in different thematic categories of vocabulary. However, limited research has investigated the comparative impact of verbal plus content-related nonverbal (e.g., images, videos) and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal (e.g., gesture and tone) on young learners, particularly when applied to different vocabulary themes.

Based on the study above, the current researcher was motivated to conduct this study, to address the gap by investigating the influence of verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues on vocabulary retention in young learners across two specific themes: professions and physical appearance. These themes were selected to represent two contrasting types of vocabulary, one associated with societal roles and functions and the other with individual characteristics. By focusing on young learners in a primary school

setting, this study aims to compare the retention rates of these vocabulary themes to determine the most effective instructional strategies. Through this comparison, the research seeks to identify not only which types of instructional cues prove more effective but also which vocabulary themes are easier for young learners to remember, thereby providing valuable insights into optimizing vocabulary instruction for young learners.

1.2 Research Questions

From the research background that has been explained above, the research questions can be formulated as follow:

1. What is the difference in effectiveness between verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues in enhancing young learners' vocabulary retention?
2. Which vocabulary theme (profession or physical appearance) is easier for young learners to retain after being taught using verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues?

1.3 Research Objectives

In alignment with the research questions outlined above, the main objectives of the study are to:

1. To compare the effectiveness of verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues in enhancing young learners' vocabulary retention.

2. To identify which vocabulary theme (profession or physical appearance) is easier for young learners to retain after being taught using verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues.

1.4 Hypothesis

In response to the research questions stated above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. The verbal plus content-related nonverbal cues are more effective than the verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues in enhancing vocabulary retention among young learners.
2. Between the two vocabulary themes (profession and physical appearance), the vocabulary related to professions is easier for young learners to retain after being taught using both types of cues.

1.5 Significance of the Study ★★★★★★

This study aims to provide practical and theoretical benefits that can be used to enrich the literature on vocabulary teaching in the context of English language teaching for young learners. Theoretically, this study can expand the understanding of the influence of various types of nonverbal cues (verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal) in vocabulary teaching, especially for certain themes such as professions and physical appearance. This study is expected to enrich language teaching theories, especially in identifying effective types of instructional cues in enhancing vocabulary retention based on the themes taught.

Practically, this study is expected to provide recommendations for educators in choosing the most appropriate instructional strategies particularly in selecting the most appropriate instructional cues, such as content-related and paralinguistic cues to improve students' vocabulary retention, especially in choosing vocabulary themes that are easier for students to remember. By identifying vocabulary themes that are easier to remember (such as profession or physical appearance) after being taught using the two types of instructional cues, the results of this study can help teachers in designing teaching strategies that better suit students' needs and enhance their learning outcomes in English vocabulary learning. It also leads to the development of teaching materials and improved teaching techniques that can be applied directly in the classroom. Thus, the practical benefit lies in improving language teaching practices in the field.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on the effect of two types of multimodal instructional strategies, namely verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues in improving vocabulary retention among young learners. The vocabulary themes used in this study were profession (nouns) and physical appearance (adjectives), which were chosen to represent two different types of vocabulary: one related to social roles and functions and the other to physical traits and individual character. The study was conducted in primary school classrooms involving students of similar grade levels (lower grades), who participated in learning activities in a structured and controlled English context.

Although this study provides important insights into the effect of nonverbal instructional cues on vocabulary retention, there are some limitations that need to be noted. First, the study was limited to primary school students in the same location, so the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of students in different regions or educational levels. Second, only two vocabulary themes were tested in this study, namely profession and physical appearance, so it does not include all possible themes which may have different levels of difficulty or ease in vocabulary teaching.

Third, the duration of the intervention in this study was relatively short, so the results obtained only reflect the short-term impact of the nonverbal cue-based teaching method on students' vocabulary retention. This study cannot confirm whether the positive effects of these instructional cues will last in the long run or will diminish over time. In addition, the study did not measure the extent to which students were able to retain and use the learned vocabulary in broader situations or in everyday communication after the intervention was completed. .

Furthermore, because the instructional cues were implemented sequentially using different vocabulary themes, there is a possibility of carryover effect, in which students' responses during the second treatment were influenced by their previous exposure to the learning process, potentially affecting the internal validity of the findings.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

This section discusses various important points, which are listed in the title. These terms must be clearly understood by the readers, as they relate to the participant criteria and the scope of the study.

1. Vocabulary Retention

Vocabulary retention in this study refers to the ability of young learners to remember and recall vocabulary words that have been taught using specific instructional cues (verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues) within a certain period. It focuses on how well students retain the meaning and form of words after the learning process.

2. Vocabulary Themes

Vocabulary themes in this research refer to categories of vocabulary that are grouped based on familiar and relatable topics for young learners, such as profession and physical appearance. These themes help learners to associate new words with real-life contexts, making it easier for them to understand and remember.

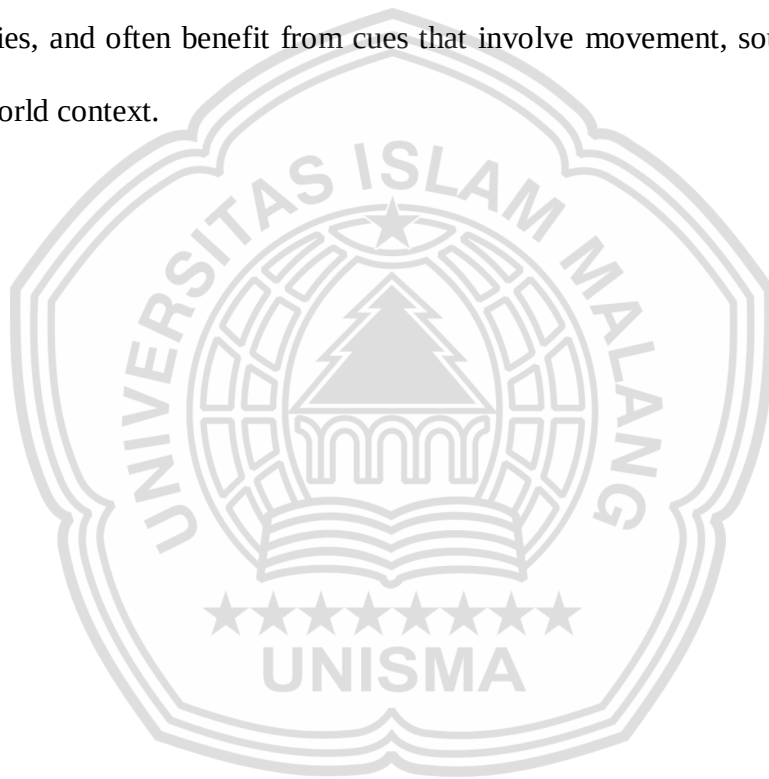
3. Content and Paralinguistic Cues

In the context of this study, content and paralinguistic cues are teaching strategies that combine verbal instruction with nonverbal support. Content-related cues involve visuals like pictures that represent the meaning of the word, while paralinguistic cues include gestures, facial

expressions, and intonation used by the teacher to support understanding and memory of vocabulary.

4. Young Learners

Young learners in this study refer to elementary school students aged between 7 to 9 years who are still developing their language skills. They tend to learn best through interactive, visual, and engaging learning activities, and often benefit from cues that involve movement, sound, and real-world context.



CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher presented the conclusion and recommendation of the study.

6.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the use of two different vocabulary teaching approaches, namely verbal plus content-related nonverbal and verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal in enhancing vocabulary retention among primary school students. This research focused on two key aspects: the difference in effectiveness between these treatments, and the retention levels based on different vocabulary themes, namely professions and physical appearance.

The findings revealed that students who were taught using the verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues retained vocabulary more effectively than those who received the verbal plus content-related nonverbal cues. This was supported by both statistical results and classroom observation data, which showed that students were more actively engaged, more attentive, and more willing to use new vocabulary when the teacher used expressive gestures, intonation, and body language.

Besides the type of treatment, the vocabulary theme was also shown to influence retention. Vocabulary items related to professions were more easily remembered than those related to physical appearance. This was likely due to the concrete and familiar nature of the profession theme, which aligned better with students' real-world experiences and background knowledge. In contrast, physical

appearance vocabulary was more abstract and less visually or emotionally engaging, making it harder to recall even though students showed interest in the topic.

In relation to the initial hypotheses, the findings only partially supported the predictions. The first hypothesis, which assumed that verbal plus content-related nonverbal cues would be more effective than paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues, was not supported by the data. Instead, the results showed that paralinguistic cues led to better vocabulary retention and greater student engagement. However, the second hypothesis was confirmed, students retained vocabulary related to the profession theme more effectively than vocabulary related to physical appearance, suggesting that familiar and concrete themes enhance learning among young learners.

Overall, this study concluded that paralinguistic cues, which include embodied and expressive cues, offer a more effective strategy for vocabulary teaching among young learners than purely visual cues. Moreover, vocabulary themes that are familiar, concrete, and contextually relevant enhance retention more strongly than abstract themes. These insights emphasize the importance of selecting both appropriate instructional strategies and vocabulary content that aligns with the developmental and cognitive characteristics of young learners.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the results and limitations of this study, several recommendations can be made for future research and classroom practice:

1. For Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to integrate paralinguistic strategies such as gestures, facial expressions, and voice modulation into their vocabulary teaching, especially when working with young learners. These strategies not only support better retention but also increase student engagement and enjoyment during learning. In addition, selecting vocabulary themes that are familiar and concrete such as professions or daily activities can further support students' understanding.

2. For Students

Students are encouraged to actively participate in vocabulary learning by paying close attention to both what the teacher says and how it is expressed through gestures, facial expressions, and visual aids. Engaging with these cues such as mimicking gestures or associating words with real objects can help reinforce understanding and memory. Students are also advised to review vocabulary thematically at home using pictures, games, or simple drawings to deepen their retention and make learning more enjoyable.

3. For Future Research

Future studies could explore: a) The impact of combining both instructional strategies (verbal plus content-related nonverbal cues and

verbal plus paralinguistic-related nonverbal cues) within one session to examine whether the integration yields even better retention. b) The long-term effects of these instructional strategies on vocabulary retention over time (e.g., delayed post-tests). c) Broader theme variations to examine which types of vocabulary categories (e.g., emotions, school objects, family) are more conducive to long-term retention.



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