

The effect of grammar translation method and text-based instruction on students' vocabulary knowledge

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Abstract: Although vocabulary instruction has been continuously integrated into EFL classrooms, the findings suggest that students possess variable degrees of vocabulary knowledge, depending on the teaching technique employed. This study was conducted to examine the impact of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Text-Based Instruction (TBI) on students' vocabulary knowledge and to compare the learning outcomes of the two methodologies. A quantitative non-experimental research design was used, with 59 tenth-grade students from SMAN 25 Bandung. Participants were separated into two groups: 30 got GTM-based training (K1) and 29 were taught with TBI (K2). The Vocabulary Size Test (VST) scores were examined using descriptive statistics with normality tests and the Mann-Whitney U test. The study found a notable disparity in vocabulary knowledge between the two groups (Sig. 0.001 < 0.05), with the GTM group having a higher average ranking (37.40) than the TBI group (22.34). While GTM was more effective at vocabulary retention and organization, TBI promoted contextualized vocabulary learning and critical thinking. These findings suggest that both strategies have distinct benefits depending on instructional aims, and that combining them may promote more complete vocabulary development in EFL environments. Future studies should investigate hybrid techniques across various learning settings.

Keywords: EFL learners, teaching method, vocabulary assessment

Abstrak: Meskipun pengajaran kosakata telah secara terus-menerus diintegrasikan ke dalam kelas bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa memiliki tingkat pengetahuan kosakata yang bervariasi tergantung pada teknik pengajaran yang digunakan. Studi ini dilakukan untuk menganalisis dampak Metode Terjemahan Gramatikal (MTG) dan Pengajaran Berbasis Teks (TBI) terhadap pengetahuan kosakata siswa serta membandingkan hasil belajar dari kedua metodologi tersebut. Desain penelitian kuantitatif non-eksperimental digunakan, dengan 59 siswa kelas X dari SMAN 25 Bandung. Peserta dibagi menjadi dua kelompok: 30 siswa menerima pelatihan berbasis GTM (K1) dan 29 siswa diajarkan dengan TBI (K2). Skor Uji Ukuran Kosakata (VST) dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dengan uji normalitas dan uji Mann-Whitney U. Studi ini menemukan perbedaan yang signifikan dalam pengetahuan kosakata antara kedua kelompok (Sig. 0.001 < 0.05), dengan kelompok MTG memiliki rata-rata skor yang lebih tinggi (37,40) dibandingkan kelompok TBI (22,34). Meskipun MTG lebih efektif dalam retensi dan organisasi kosakata, TBI mempromosikan pembelajaran kosakata yang kontekstual dan pemikiran kritis. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kedua strategi memiliki manfaat yang berbeda tergantung pada tujuan instruksional, dan menggabungkan keduanya dapat mempromosikan pengembangan kosakata yang lebih lengkap dalam lingkungan EFL. Studi masa depan harus menyelidiki teknik hibrida di berbagai lingkungan belajar.

Kata kunci: Pembelajar EFL, metode pengajaran, penilaian kosakata

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is not merely an element of language but a cornerstone of language proficiency, especially in English, which functions as a global lingua franca. In an increasingly interconnected world, a strong vocabulary base is essential for successful communication across diverse fields (Alisoy, 2023), including academia, business, science,

and diplomacy (Tiansoodeenon et al., 2023). Vocabulary knowledge, includes both the quantity of words a person is familiar and the extent of their understanding of those words (Qian & Lin, 2019), is a significant predictor of language proficiency and is indispensable for developing proficiency in the four main language abilities: listening, writing, reading, and speaking (Afrezah et al., 2024; Dewi & Jimmi, 2018; Gaffar et al., 2025; Schmitt, 2014; Zekarias, 2023). Thus, vocabulary development should be prioritized in language instruction, since it establishes the foundation for learners to interact meaningfully with both oral and written texts.

Vocabulary knowledge is referred to as vocabulary depth, measures how well speakers understand a word (Maskor & Baharudin, 2016). Understanding vocabulary is indispensable for mastering any language skill, aiding in comprehending written and oral texts, allowing individuals to express their thoughts, emotions, and desires (Rahmah et al., 2023). As students become acquainted with more words, they gain confidence in deciphering and interpreting unfamiliar words based on the context (Dauletova & Rahimova, 2022). Vocabulary knowledge is critical to learners' overall language learning since unfamiliar words can cause difficulty digesting text and hinder reading comprehension (Moghadam et al., 2012). Vocabulary knowledge includes understanding vocabulary elements, organizing words lexically, mastering them in both receptive and productive ways, and achieving fluency (Schmitt, 2014). Furthermore, vocabulary incorporates all words that students must master, including the recognition of word forms and the comprehension of their meanings (Sukma & Lubis, 2025). The multifaceted nature of vocabulary indicates that vocabulary education must encompass word meaning, usage, organization, and fluency to facilitate comprehensive language development.

Despite continuous vocabulary instruction in EFL classrooms, many students struggle to develop sufficient vocabulary knowledge for effective language use. Research by Lutfiyah et al. (2022) highlights that challenges in vocabulary acquisition stem from both internal and external factors, such as learners' confidence, unfamiliarity with the target language, ineffective instructional approaches, and lack of exposure to real contexts. Furthermore, challenges identified by students include pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and memorization, as well as motivational elements and support from classmates and teachers (Kaphle, 2024). Applying suitable instructional methods can enhance students' understanding and evolve their vocabulary (Ismail et al., 2025). In line with this, Baharudin et al. (2024), underscore that instructional approaches are crucial in influencing students' language proficiency. This matter gains significance within the framework of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum specifically at the secondary education tier (Phase F) which aims for students to communicate proficiently in English across diverse genres, including narrative, exposition, and discussion, at a proficiency level corresponding to CEFR B2. Attaining this objective necessitates extensive vocabulary knowledge; nonetheless, numerous students encounter difficulties in reaching the level due to insufficient vocabulary competency.

Several instructional methods are used to address this issue. For example, the GTM emphasizes memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, often neglecting real-life language use and communicative skills (Elmayantie, 2015). GTM is a traditional method that teaches the target language through translation from the native language, focusing on grammatical rules and vocabulary memorization to facilitate the reading of literature in the target language (Nisha, 2024). Using the target language is crucial when introducing new

vocabulary and during communication (Daud et al., 2022). Teachers may also use supplementary tools such as pictures, gestures, and familiar terms to aid understanding (Andrä et al., 2020; Pateşan et al., 2018; Rowe et al., 2013). Although considered a conventional method, GTM remains helpful in vocabulary and grammar instruction (Chang, 2011). One of its features is a review step, which is essential in assessing students' understanding and reinforcing previously taught materials (Handayani & Sujito, 2024). However, GTM is characterized by one-way interaction, where the teacher is the primary source of information and dominates the classroom activities (Putri, 2022). Students typically ask questions only when they do not understand the meaning of certain words or sentence structures, and the teacher provides direct explanations to clarify the lesson (Natsir & Sanjaya, 2014).

In contrast, TBI encourages language learning through exposure to authentic texts, fostering deeper understanding and application of vocabulary in context (Melon-Galvez, 2024; Rashid, 2020). TBI promotes the explicit instruction of textual structures and grammatical features, allowing learners to comprehend how language operates across different genres and contexts (Sadeghi et al., 2013). Teachers using TBI often incorporate a variety of authentic texts that represent real-world topics and multiple perspectives. These texts are employed as models to help students identify linguistic patterns and rhetorical structures typical of specific genres. In doing so, learners become more aware of how grammatical choices influence meaning.

Instruction under this model involves structured activities such as reading, discussing, and writing, all aimed at cultivating learners' ability to communicate effectively using whole texts rather than isolated language elements. Moreover, the Text-Based instructional process includes guided practice and immediate corrective feedback to support students as they refine their language skills (Grossen et al., 2016). Teachers also draw upon students' prior knowledge of text types from their first language, leveraging this background to scaffold new learning experiences (Graham et al., 2024). In line with these principles, effective TBI implementation typically involves designing units of work that target complete-text comprehension and production, offering students opportunities to develop language proficiency within meaningful communicative contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 1982). While both methods are widely applied in EFL contexts, empirical research on this topic that directly compare their effectiveness in improving vocabulary knowledge is limited, particularly in Indonesian secondary schools using the Merdeka Curriculum.

A few researchers focused on isolated methods, and there have been limited studies concerned with directly comparing GTM and TBI using a valid and reliable measurement tool such as the VST. Therefore, this research intends to bridge that gap by conducting a study and analyzing the impact of GTM and TBI on students' vocabulary knowledge using the VST. This research seeks to examine the effects of the Grammar Translation Method and Text-Based Instruction on students' vocabulary knowledge and to determine which method is more effective in enhancing students' vocabulary based on the VST results. This study contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence that can guide educators in selecting effective teaching strategies to support vocabulary growth in EFL classrooms.

METHOD

This study utilizes a quantitative research method to systematically compare the effectiveness of two teaching methods, Text-Based Learning and the Grammar Translation Method, in improving students' vocabulary mastery. A quantitative approach is described as a collection of related constructs (or variables) that are formulated into a proposition, or hypothesis that establishes the relationship between variables (usually in magnitude or direction) by Creswell and Creswell (2018) in their book "Research Design," fifth edition. The quantitative approach is chosen because it allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data to determine whether a notable difference exists in students' vocabulary achievement between the two teaching methods.

The researcher performed a causal comparative analysis on the Vocabulary Size Test from Nation (2001). Causal-comparative research aims to identify the underlying causes or effects of existing differences across individuals. The causal-comparative technique involves identifying differences between two groups and investigating potential causes or consequences (Andriyanto et al., 2021; Nasir et al., 2020). The level test is designed such that each student is given their score at every level. The score profiles can be compared between individuals and groups to determine who performs better at specific levels or overall.

In this design, a distinction must be made between the first group and the second group. The research design can be illustrated as follows:

Table 1. Group classification based on class, method, and test code.

Group	Class	Method	Test
Group 1	X-10	GTM	T ₁
Group 2	X-2	TBI	T ₂

Where:

GTM: Grammar Translation Method

TBI: Text Based Instruction

T: Vocabulary Size Test administered

The participants of this investigation comprised tenth-grade students enrolled at SMAN 25 Bandung during the academic year 2024/2025. The participant pool consisted of 353 students, distributed across ten classes, namely X-1 through X-10. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select two classes for the study, based on the pedagogical methods implemented by their respective instructors. Class X-2 was chosen due to the application of GTM, while Class X-10 was selected for its utilization of TBI. This intentional selection of classes aimed to facilitate a comparative analysis of the differential impacts of these instructional approaches on vocabulary acquisition among students.

While the overall sample encompassed 71 students, data collection was conducted with the participation of 59 individuals who were present at the time. Consequently, the analysis was predicated on data retrieved from these 59 participants, who were representative of a cross-section of tenth-grade students. This context was deemed appropriate for investigating the influence of varying teaching methodologies on

vocabulary retention. All participants were adequately briefed regarding the study's objectives, and ethical considerations were meticulously observed. Informed consent was obtained from all involved students, and measures to uphold confidentiality were rigorously maintained throughout the data collection and analytical phases. The processes of participant selection and research implementation strictly adhered to the ethical standards established by the institution.

The data for this study were collected using a Vocabulary Size Test (VST) designed by Nation and Beglar (2007), which is extensively recognized for its efficacy in assessing learners' receptive vocabulary knowledge. To strengthen its validity, Rowland (2018) conducted a Rasch-based validation study on a 40-item version of the VST administered to high school students. The research validated that the majority of items conformed to the Rasch model effectively and consistently assessed the target construct. Notably, while the original test encompasses vocabulary bands ranging from the first to the fourteenth 1,000-word levels, this particular study utilized only the initial five levels (1st–5th 1,000), selected based on the estimated proficiency of the participants. This selection was deemed appropriate, considering Indonesian senior high school students typically exhibit a vocabulary repertoire of fewer than 2,000-word families (Wero et al., 2021). Previous research supports the assertion that learners need to acquire a minimum of 3,000 to 4,000 words to effectively comprehend academic texts and perform well on national examinations (Duran & Sendag, 2012).

To enhance both comprehension and precision, the answer choices were translated into Bahasa Indonesia, which bilingual formats provide a more accurate reflection of the vocabulary knowledge of EFL learners. Additionally, an option labelled "I do not know" was included for each question, instructing participants to select this response when uncertain rather than guessing. This methodological adjustment ensured a more reliable measure of vocabulary knowledge. It facilitated excluding participants who answered all questions without utilizing this option, as it was presumed, they may have been guessing.

The test comprised a total of 50 items, with 10 items allotted to each frequency band. Students completed the assessment during a single 60-minute session within their respective classrooms, adhering to standardized testing conditions. Out of a sample of 71 students drawn from two distinct classes at SMAN 25 Bandung, only 59 students were present and submitted valid responses throughout the data-gathering stage. The administration process for the Vocabulary Size Test was directly overseen by the researcher, with assistance from classroom teachers. Students were directed to work independently without the aid of any supplementary materials. Ethical protocols were meticulously observed; all participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation.

The present analysis sought to examine the differences in vocabulary knowledge between students instructed via the GTM and those receiving instruction through TBI. Initially, a parametric statistical analysis was proposed. However, preliminary assessments of normality, conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk test, it was shown that the data violated the assumption of a normal distribution ($p < 0.05$). As a result, a non-parametric statistical approach, specifically referred to as the Mann-Whitney U test, was utilized to compare the performance of the two independent groups, adhering to established guidelines for the analysis of non-normally distributed data.

Prior to executing the statistical analyses, raw scores from both groups were meticulously collected and organized. The vocabulary knowledge of each participant was quantified through their performance on the Vocabulary Size Test (VST), which was assessed based on the number of correct responses across five distinct levels. Participants who indicated “I don’t know” for any of the items were excluded from the dataset, as their responses were considered unreliable for the purposes of this analysis. All data analysis was performed using SPSS software to guarantee the accuracy and reliability of the results. The findings were interpreted in light of the research questions and related literature, and are presented in tabular and narrative form in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the effects of GTM and TBI on students' vocabulary proficiency at SMAN 25 Bandung. A total of 59 tenth-grade students participated in the study, consisting of 30 students in the GTM group (K1) and 29 in the TBI group (K2).

Descriptive statistics were employed to sum up the vocabulary scores of students within each group. Table 2 illustrates that the GTM group achieved a superior mean score ($M = 3690.00$, $SD = 1049.25$) and median score (4000.00), whereas the TBI group recorded a lower mean ($M = 2982.76$, $SD = 636.99$) and median (3000.00).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary scores by group

Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
GTM (K1)	30	3690.00	4000.00	1049.25	1200	5000
TBI (K2)	29	2982.76	3000.00	636.99	1900	4800

The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was performed to ascertain the suitable statistical test for group comparison. The results indicated that the scores of the GTM group were not normally distributed ($p = 0.003$), while the scores of the TBI group fulfilled the normality criterion ($p = 0.203$), as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Shapiro-Wilk test of normality

Group	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig. (p-value)	Normality Interpretation
GTM (K1)	-	30	0.003	Not normally distributed
TBI (K2)	-	29	0.203	Normally distributed

Due to the non-normal distribution in at least one group, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to evaluate the differential in vocabulary performance between the two groups. Table 4 shows a statistically significant difference between GTM and TBI ($U = 213.000$, $p = 0.001$).

Table 5 illustrates that the GTM group exhibited a higher mean rank (37.40) than the TBI group (22.34), signifying enhanced performance in vocabulary knowledge among students instructed via the GTM method.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test result

Test	Value
Mann-Whitney U	213.000
Wilcoxon W	648.000
Z	-3.37
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001

Table 5. Mean rank of vocabulary knowledge by teaching method

Group N	Mean Rank	Interpretation
GTM (K1)	30 37.40	Higher vocabulary test performance
TBI (K2)	29 22.34	Lower vocabulary test performance
Total	59 -	-

The findings indicate that the Grammar GTM, which prioritizes vocabulary memorization and translation, may produce superior short-term vocabulary learning relative to the more contextual and conversational approach of TBI. The non-normal distribution of the GTM group's scores signifies variability in student performance.

GTM may exhibit enhanced outcomes in vocabulary acquisition owing to its congruence with the learning traits of Indonesian EFL students, who are frequently familiar with exam-centric schooling and teacher-directed instruction. In these contexts, formal methodologies such as GTM may appear more familiar and efficacious, especially in settings where success is assessed by written examinations. The method's dependence on clear instruction, translation, and repetition aligns with students' previous learning experiences, therefore enhancing comprehension and retention (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The cultural and educational compatibility may contribute to GTM's perceived advantage in this study. Recent empirical research corroborates this concept. Rosi and Suharyadi (2024) discovered that GTM allows educators to methodically oversee learning via explicit grammar instruction and translation tasks, offering a coherent framework that improves student comprehension. Similarly, Akramy et al. (2022) noted that EFL educators value GTM for its manageability, enabling them to direct classes efficiently and emphasize linguistic precision. Milawati (2019) case study underscores the function of GTM in facilitating learning through the use of native language support and grammatical classification.

Whereas, TBI, applied in class X2, focused on the utilization of language inside significant circumstances, encompassing text creation and examination. Despite students instructed by TBI exhibiting inferior vocabulary test scores, the more regularly distributed results indicate a more uniform learning experience throughout the cohort. TBI promotes an organic process of vocabulary acquisition, perhaps enhancing long-term memory and practical language application. The data suggest that although GTM may yield better outcomes in test-oriented vocabulary performance, TBI provides a more equitable and sustainable method for vocabulary enhancement. Consequently, a cohesive instructional framework that amalgamates GTM for specific vocabulary training and TBI for contextual reinforcement may promote more thorough and effective learning results.

Findings from our research corroborate the research conducted by Prasetyani et al. (2024), who asserted that the Grammar Translation Method works more efficiently in

enhancing students' mastery of vocabulary and sentence structure. They observed that "the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) was found to be more effective in enhancing students' vocabulary and sentence structure mastery compared to the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM)," thus reinforcing the present study's conclusion regarding GTM's significant contribution to vocabulary development. This conclusion is also backed up by Karnain and Widiati (2021), who concluded positive student responses to applying GTM in reading instruction, as the method facilitated vocabulary enrichment, organization of ideas, and comprehension of texts. These findings imply that when implemented effectively, GTM can substantially support vocabulary enhancement by providing structured exposure to language forms and meanings.

Furthermore, these findings correspond with Brown (2007) theoretical framework, which emphasizes the critical importance of teaching approaches like GTM in developing language competence. Brown asserts that GTM enhances grammar understanding and vocabulary usage by organized translation exercises, establishing a robust foundation in language structure. He underscores the necessity of aligning instructional methods with distinct learning objectives, acknowledging that diverse approaches yield various learning outcomes. Moreover, GTM facilitates vocabulary enhancement by providing students with thematic word lists supplemented with translation exercises. Through analyzing word meanings across languages, learners acquire insights into synonyms, antonyms, and idiomatic expressions, so establishing a robust basis for nuanced vocabulary comprehension (Naghiyeva, 2025). This supports the idea that GTM fosters metacognitive processes, including the analysis of lexical patterns and the formation of linkages between words across linguistic systems, thus enhancing students' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge (Thitavangso et al., 2025).

The Grammar Translation Method offers a solid foundation in grammar and vocabulary; yet, it fails to improve communicative competence and practical language use (Keo & Lan, 2024). Critics argue that an emphasis on grammar and translation may hinder students' ability to converse fluently and spontaneously in the target language (Kasim & Kuprina, 2024). Listiani et al. (2024) reflect this nuanced assessment, asserting that traditional methods like GTM may not substantially enhance students' vocabulary proficiency. They promote more interactive and engaging methodologies, such as the Visual Auditory Kinesthetic (VAK) technique. Their position is additionally corroborated by Joe (1998), who illustrated that reading and retelling activities promote incidental vocabulary acquisition via generative processing, hence confirming the advantages of Text-Based Instruction (TBI).

To conform GTM to the regulations set out by the government in the Curriculum 2013, eight of the eleven interview participants in this study expressed a preference for amalgamating GTM with diverse modern methodologies to augment the effectiveness of the learning process (Sari et al., 2021). TBI offers contextualized vocabulary exposure and encourages active learner engagement, hence improving comprehension and retention. In this setting, while GTM continues to be advantageous for vocabulary learning, its efficacy can be enhanced by adaptive techniques, interactive media, and instruction customized to learners' requirements. In actual classroom settings, educators often integrate the Grammar-Translation Method with collaborative techniques like group work to effectively manage big classrooms and facilitate peer engagement. Moreover, questioning strategies

are employed to maintain student engagement (Fata et al., 2022). This integrated approach corresponds with Handayani and Sujito (2024) claim that the inclusion of student-centered and communicative components in conventional models such as GTM can markedly enhance learner motivation and comprehensive language acquisition. These findings emphasize the need for a hybrid pedagogical framework that combines traditional methods with contemporary instructional practices to enhance language learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The study identified a statistically significant disparity in students' vocabulary knowledge based on the educational approach employed. The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a p-value of 0.001, which is below the conventional significance level of 0.05. This verifies that the instructional method significantly influenced vocabulary acquisition results. Group K1, instructed via the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), achieved a superior mean rank of 37.40, whereas Group K2, which underwent Text-Based Instruction (TBI), registered a mean rank of 22.34. The data suggest that GTM was more effective in improving vocabulary knowledge in this study, perhaps due to its systematic focus on memorizing and translation of vocabulary items.

Although GTM demonstrated greater exam performance, the pedagogical benefits of TBI must be acknowledged. Text-Based Instruction fosters vocabulary enhancement via contextual exposure and active language engagement. Despite not yielding superior scores in this study, TBI's methodology is essential in promoting enduring vocabulary retention and pragmatic language application. Consequently, subsequent research ought to investigate the amalgamation of GTM and TBI to harmonize direct instruction with contextual learning. A comprehensive strategy may equip students with a robust vocabulary foundation and the capacity to utilize language effectively in practical situations.

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