

Teacher's Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary at Elementary School: A Case Study at First Grade Students of Elementary School 3 Karang Bongkot West Lombok, Academic Year 2024/2025

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Received: August 2025; Revised: September 2025; Published: October 2025

Abstract

This study investigates the strategies employed by English teachers in teaching vocabulary to first-grade students at Elementary School 3 Karang Bongkot, West Lombok, during the academic year 2024/2025. The study aims to identify the challenges faced by teachers and describe the effective strategies used to overcome these challenges. The method of this research was qualitative research. The subject is an English teacher of SDN 3 Karang Bongkot who taught the first grade. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal several challenges, including classroom management, diversity of students' mother tongue, and limited teaching facilities or media. To overcome these barriers, the teacher applied the Total Physical Response (TPR) through songs and games supported with translation, memorization, and visual aids like printed pictures. These approaches successfully increased student participation, maintained focus, and created a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. The study concludes that effective vocabulary learning for young learners depends on the teacher's creativity in combining methods, techniques, and media suited to children's characteristics.

Keywords: Teaching Strategies, Vocabulary, Young Learners.

How to Cite: Rahman, L. N. A. S., Arafiq., Susanti, N. W. M., & Selmiana, D. S. (2025). Teacher's Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary at Elementary School: A Case Study at First Grade Students of Elementary School 3 Karang Bongkot West Lombok, Academic Year 2024/2025. *Journal of Authentic Research*, 4(2), 1743-1757. <https://doi.org/10.36312/jar.v4i2.3746>



<https://doi.org/10.36312/jar.v4i2.3746>

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INTRODUCTION

Language is something that is important for human life because language can help humans communicate to convey feelings, convey ideas, and interact with others (Setiawan, 2017). English is one of the world languages, which is often used to communicate between people in the world both formally and informally. Richard and Rodgers (2014) highlight that English stands out as a major international language, getting taught extensively in many countries worldwide. People from all sorts of nations often turn to English as their go to way to communicate during different international events.

In Indonesia, English is taught as a subject from elementary school to college. Because English is not only used for the world of government, economy or business,

but also to support the world of education and technology. Despite its importance, many Indonesian students have challenges learning English because English is not their mother tongue and they do not know the important thing which is vocabulary. Richard (2002) points out that vocabulary is a key part of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For students aiming to really master a language, it's super important to focus on building up their vocabulary.

In Indonesia, English is taught since elementary school. Which starts from the age of 6 - 12 years because the best way to teach a foreign language is to learn a foreign language from a young age. According to Aslamiah (2022) English for Young Learners (EYL) refers to primary school students aged 6 to 12 years. These students are categorized into two groups: younger group, who are 6 to 8 years old, and older group, who are 9 to 12 years old. Based on their grade level, the younger group includes Grade 1, 2, and 3, while the older group consists of Grade 4, 5, and 6 students.

However, young learners are still in the stage of cognitive development where their thinking is simple and egocentric. They often struggle with abstract concepts and have limited attention spans. Based on Harmer as cited by Wulandari et al. (2020) teachers must prepare interesting teaching activities and strategies because children easily lose interest and attention after 10 minutes or more, so they easily feel bored.

To ensure the learning process runs smoothly, teachers must be able to prepare effective strategies in teaching English vocabulary. In choosing and designing teaching strategies, teachers must adjust to the curriculum, school conditions, age-appropriate learner characteristics, learning objectives, basic competencies and skills that a teacher must have. This is done in order to produce quality learning outcomes. Therefore, a teacher must be responsible for developing approaches and ensuring the implementation of learning activities. According to Silver et al. (2007), "teaching's purpose is to create a conversation that connects these disparate individuals around a common core of learning." Teacher should be able to select an acceptable strategy for teaching students.

SD Negeri 3 Karang Bongkot has "A" accreditation, one of the longest established schools in West Nusa Tenggara. This school uses a mixed curriculum; Merdeka curriculum and 2013 curriculum. Grades 1, 2, 4 and 5 use the Merdeka curriculum and grades 3 and 6 use the 2013 curriculum. English is also taught in this school from 1 to 6 grade. Grade 1 is one of the most active and enthusiastic classes. Grade 1 is also the earliest class in foreign language development.

In Grade 1, there are still students whose interest and enthusiasm for learning is lacking so that classroom management in this class is disrupted and learning activities become less effective. This is due to the teacher's lack of skills and understanding in combining approaches, methods and media for young learners. According to Veren et al. (2023), they stated that there are several techniques or strategies used to attract the attention of young learners. So as to make language learning effective and fun, such as songs, games, and Total Physical Response (TPR). Total Physical Response combines language-related left-brain activity with right brain coordination to improve comprehension and memory. The range of materials that can be taught to young children can include things like numbers, fruits, animals and objects in the classroom.

Some previous studies discuss English teaching strategies, such as Hariati (2013) who found 5th grade teachers using Inquiry based learning, picture and games, while Haliza (2020) who examined the Numbered Head Together and Think Pair Share methods in senior high school. However, most of these studies focus on higher education levels and have not targeted early elementary grades which have different learning needs. Therefore, this study is specifically about English vocabulary teaching strategies in grade 1 in the context of Merdeka Curriculum, especially in public primary schools in West Lombok. The early years are crucial for language development, and inappropriate strategies can lead to students' low vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, this research was conducted to fill the gap and provide a real picture of teaching practices in the field.

This research explores the challenges faced by teachers in introducing English vocabulary to grade one student, mainly due to the short attention span of young learners. To overcome this, it is important for teachers to effectively implement developmentally appropriate teaching strategies through playful learning. Using Total Physical Response (TPR) combined with strategies such as "listen and repeat" and "listen and do", songs and games, can make vocabulary learning more interesting and effective. Without such age appropriate and interactive strategy, young learners can quickly lose interest in learning English, which can have a negative impact on English language development in later grade levels. This research is crucial in shedding light on the barriers and practical solutions in early vocabulary teaching at the primary school level.

Based on the explanation above, this writer is interested in observing the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English vocabulary and what strategies teachers use in teaching English vocabulary. Therefore, the author decided to conduct research entitled: Teacher's Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary at Elementary School: (A Case Study at First Grade Students of Elementary School 3 Karang Bongkot West Lombok, Academic Year 2024/2025).

METHODS

Research Design

The research was conducted using research descriptive qualitative research. The purpose of this study was to find out the teacher strategies used by teachers to teaching English vocabulary at Elementary School 3 Karang Bongkot, West Lombok. The researcher collecting the data by using observation and interview. According to Oranga and Matere (2023) they stated that qualitative research is an effective method for obtaining specific information about behavior, values, views, and social context in a population. This approach explores the "human" aspects of a problem, including the beliefs, opinions, emotions, and interactions of individuals in a particular environment.

Meanwhile, Pahleviannur et al. (2022) state that the aim of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Specifically, qualitative research aims to describe the object of research through various forms of documentation such as photos, videos, illustrations, and verbal and non-verbal narratives. Reveal the meaning contained in a phenomenon through in-depth

interviews and participatory observation, and explain the phenomenon in detail and systematically to avoid misperceptions and interpretations.

Research Setting and Subject

The research was conducted to English teacher at Elementary School 3 Karang Bongkot West, Lombok, Academic Year 2024/2025. This school located at Karang Bongkot, Labuapi District, West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. SDN 3 Karang Bongkot has A accreditation, it means that this school has a good quality. This school is also unique because it introduces English from the early class as a grade 1 to 6. Meanwhile, most elementary schools in West Lombok only teach English from grades 4 to 6. This school also uses a mixed curriculum, namely the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is used in grades 1, 2, 4, and 5. Meanwhile, the 2013 Curriculum is used in grades 3 and 6.

The researcher selected one English teacher from SDN 3 Karang Bongkot. One of the teachers there who has been teaching for a dozen years. She has taught at several elementary schools in Mataram. She has also opened private English lessons in ampenan, since 2010. So, this means she has a lot of experience in teaching English, especially in teaching vocabulary. Therefore, the researcher chose her as the subject of this study.

The researcher selected students from the first grade, totaling 18 students as participants from the observations made during class. The researcher chose this class because this class is the earliest class to be taught English. And this is also very suitable as a class that will be taught the first step of English, namely vocabulary. This first-grade class is also an active class. So, the researcher decided to make the first class as an observation participant and research subject.

Source of Data

To observe related information about teacher strategies in teaching English vocabulary at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot, requires data. Data is an important aspect in conducting qualitative descriptive research. Therefore, the way the data is processed is very important. According to Mack et al. (2005) stated that qualitative data form it is in the form of field notes, audio or video recordings, and interview transcripts. Every data obtained for research must have a data source. Quoted from Moleong (1987) in Haliza (2022), states that qualitative data sources can be obtained from people, objects or locations that include information related to research. Researchers conducted interviews with grade 1 English teacher and students totaling 18 students at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot.

Techniques of Collecting Data

Observation

According to Richards and Schmidt (2013) they stated that teaching observation is a commonly used method in teacher training programs to improve learning effectiveness. Observation also means finding out data on a phenomenon. Where this is done so that researchers understand the phenomenon being studied. Observation is also a form of action taken by researchers so that their research objectives are achieved. There are several types of data collection. In this study, researchers obtained data through research sources through people. By observing the activities carried out by an English teacher and students of SDN 3 Karang Bongkot. The researcher will observe in grade 1. This observation will be conducted twice a

week, in accordance with English lessons, namely every Tuesday and Friday, starting from 07.30 to 09.00 a.m. This is done to find out the teaching strategies used by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary and what problems the teacher faces in teaching English vocabulary. Meanwhile, Mack et al. (2005) stated that Participant observation is an ethnography based qualitative method that allows researchers to understand the perspective of the population under study. The researcher can either observe only or participate in daily activities in locations relevant to the research. In this process, it is necessary to carefully record observations in field notes, including informal interactions with research participants.

Interview

According to Mack et al. (2005), interviews are a technique designed to understand participants' perspectives on research topics. Researchers use this method to extract as much information as possible from participants by asking questions neutrally, listening carefully, and following up on the answers given. In the interview process, the researcher does not influence participants with personal opinions or encouragement to give certain answers. In-depth interviews are generally conducted face-to-face between one interviewer and one participant. In this research, the main focus is on direct individual interviews. This type of interview is an in dept interview. Informants will be asked about ideas or experiences related to English teaching strategies, especially in teaching English vocabulary at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot.

Techniques of Data Analysis

After gathering the data, which included both observation and interview. The writer began the analysis process. This process involves three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion. Based on Miles et al. (2014).

Data Reduction

According to Sugiyono (2014), data reduction involves the process of summarizing and selecting the most relevant information, identifying patterns and main themes, and discarding unnecessary parts. This process helps present a clearer picture of the data and make it easier for researchers to find what is needed later. In other words, data reduction helps sharpen the focus of researcher by highlighting key points only. This allows researchers draw and verify conclusions more effectively. In this study, data reduction was conducted throughout the researcher filtered out irrelevant information and kept only the meaningful parts of the interviews.

Data Display

After data reduction, the next step is data display. At this stage, the researcher organizes and presents the collected information clearly. Data display involves arranging the information so it's easy to understand, draw conclusion from, and decide what actions to take. In qualitative research, data can be displayed through short summaries, outlines or flowcharts. By using data display, researchers can better see what's happening and determine the next steps based on the insight shown in the data.

Conclusion

The last step is drawing conclusion and verify them. In qualitative research, the conclusion aims to answer the research question, which may change as the study progresses. After describing and interpreting the data, the researcher analyzes it

further to make sense of the findings and then draws conclusion based on that interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

First Observation

The first English vocabulary lesson was about greetings. In this first lesson, the teacher used an LCD projector as a teaching aid, showing the students images such as; good morning, good afternoon, good evening, and good night. After that, the teacher interpreted and explained the images on the LCD projector. The teacher also continued to ask the students to repeat the vocabulary together. However, during the observation, there were some students who were moving around the desks, disturbing their peers, or even hiding under the table. Therefore, the teacher introduced a song related to theme 1, which was greetings.

The lyric:

Selamat pagi itu good morning

Selamat sore itu good afternoon

Selamat malam itu good evening

Mau bobo bilang good night

This makes it easier for them to remember and learn. The teacher asked the students to repeat the song until they memorized it, then she sang the song with some of the lyrics omitted and asked the students to fill in the blanks. She rewarded those who could answer correctly by allowing them to go outside to play.

Second Observation

At this meeting, the English teacher reviewed the previous lesson. The English teacher continued with the material related to greetings. During this session, the teacher brought visual aids, such as printed photos related to the material, including; good morning, good afternoon, good evening," and "good night." The teacher then re-explained the material using printed images and the song that had been taught regarding greetings. After repeating the song together and showing the images, it was observed that some students were still distracted and lacked focus. The teacher then invited the students to play a game called Touch the Things I Say. In this game, the teacher uses existing printed images and sticks them in several places around the classroom that are easy for students to reach and touch. Before the game begins, the teacher explains the rules and then invites the students to play. The teacher selects four students to play. If the teacher says "good morning," the students must find the "good morning" image and touch it. Once all the students have moved forward, the teacher repeats the game, but this time only two students are selected for each round. The teacher then invites the students to go outside to play once they have moved forward. The teacher repeats the game, but this time only two students participate in each round. Then the teacher allows the students to leave the game once they have advanced.

Third Observation

At this meeting, the teacher introduced a new theme, namely introduction. The English teacher also connected the theme to everyday life. At this meeting, the teacher initially wanted to use an LCD projector to teach in class, but because there were only

one LCD projectors at the school and both were already being used by other teachers, the English teacher decided not to use the LCD projector. So, the teacher wrote the material being taught on the board, such as "hi my name is Adit." However, the teacher asked the students to replace the name "Adit" with their own names. The teacher repeated the example several times, then asked the students to introduce themselves one by one. The teacher also taught the introduction material using the song My Name Is John

The lyric:

What is your name?

My name is John

After introducing the song My Name is John, the teacher asked the students to sing it together repeatedly. After that, the teacher asked them to replace the name 'John' with their own names, then sang "What is your name?" and the students answered using their own names. After that, the teacher asked the students to come forward in pairs to ask each other's names and answer questions from their friends. Finally, the teacher asked the students, "What is your name?" Those who could answer were allowed to go out and play.

Fourth Observation

At this meeting, the teacher reviewed the previous material that had been taught to the students. The teacher sang the song "My Name is John" with the students and asked each of them, "What is your name?" and the students answered according to their respective names. After that, the teacher wrote on the board, "How old are you?" and "I am seven years old." The teacher explained the meaning of the words to the students in the class. However, in the process of translating the meaning of the words, she did not use only one language, but had to explain it in two languages, namely Indonesian and Sasak. This was done because there were two students who used Sasak more often in their daily lives, so their ability to understand Indonesian was still limited. Therefore, in order for all students to understand the lesson equally, the teacher felt it was necessary to convey the meaning of the words in both languages. However, the use of two languages in the explanation sometimes reduced the amount of time allocated for learning, because the teacher needed more time to explain in detail in both Indonesian and Sasak. In addition, the teacher also explained in the second sentence why she wrote "seven years old," because all of the students were seven years old. These sentences were repeated over and over, and the students were asked to repeat what the teacher said. Then the teacher asked each student the question, "How old are you?" In the last activity, the teacher asked each student, "What is your name?" and "How old are you?" The students answered the teacher's questions, and those who answered correctly were allowed to play outside.

Teaching Method

The teaching method used by English teachers to teach first-grade vocabulary at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot is Total Physical Response (TPR). English teachers consider this method to be the most suitable for teaching first-grade students. This is because this method involves physical movements that can attract the attention of young learners. This method is implemented through songs. Initially, the teacher gave four examples of movements related to good morning, good afternoon, good evening, and good night. Then the teacher gave commands such as "good morning" and the

students responded physically with the movements that had been taught. Next, the teacher introduced the children to songs related to greetings.

The lyric:

Selamat pagi itu good morning

Selamat sore itu good afternoon

Selamat malam itu good evening

Mau bobo bilang good night

While singing this song, the teacher performed movements that corresponded to the meaning of the words. She repeated these movements over and over again. Then, the teacher gave commands to the young students, and they responded physically, but this time while singing. The teacher and students repeated this over and over again so that the children could remember new vocabulary through movement and song.

Teaching Techniques and Media

In teaching English vocabulary, the first-grade teacher at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot applies two main techniques, namely memorization and translation. The memorization technique is carried out by repeating vocabulary continuously, both individually and together in a classical form. Teachers accustom students to repeating new words over and over again until they become familiar with them. Students are often asked to repeat while pointing to pictures or performing certain movements.

Meanwhile, the translation technique is used to clarify the meaning of vocabulary so that it can be understood more quickly. Teachers generally use Indonesian, but for the two students whose Indonesian language skills are still limited, teachers also use the Sasak language for explanations. This was confirmed by the teacher in an interview "Kalau menjelaskan arti kata, saya sering pakai bahasa Indonesia, tapi kalau ada anak yang tidak paham, saya pakai bahasa Sasak juga supaya semua bisa mengerti". Thus, the translation technique still plays an important role as a bridge of understanding even though a communicative approach is being applied.

In addition to techniques, teachers also implement teaching strategies in the form of songs and games. Songs are used to introduce vocabulary in a fun way. For example, on the theme of greetings, teachers teach simple songs with lyrics. "Selamat pagi itu good morning, selamat sore itu good afternoon..." This song is sung repeatedly until the students are able to memorize it. In the introduction theme, the teacher uses the song My Name is John by replacing the word "John" with the students' names, so that each child has the opportunity to introduce themselves.

Game strategies are also often applied, one of which is the Touch the Things I Say game, where the teacher instructs students to touch the pictures that correspond to the vocabulary words spoken. This activity makes students run around looking for the right pictures, thus involving physical movement. The teacher emphasized this in an interview. "Ketika anak-anak kehilangan fokus belajar, kita biasanya membuat mereka semangat lagi dengan cara memberikan game-game yang menarik atau melalui lagu-lagu."

In using learning media, teachers combine LCD projectors with printed pictures. LCD are used when available, for example to display simple images or videos related to vocabulary, such as illustrations of daily activities on the theme of

greetings. However, because the number of LCDs in schools is limited, only two units are available for shared use, so their use is not always optimal. Therefore, teachers more often rely on printed images that they have made or prepared themselves. For example, when explaining the vocabulary words "good morning" or "good night," teachers show pictures of the morning scene with the sun rising, as well as pictures of the night scene with the moon and stars. Teachers narrate "Kalau untuk gambar, kemarin waktu kita ajarkan greeting, itu kita pakai gambar print. Misalnya gambar kegiatan pagi hari, nanti anak-anak kita suruh tunjuk mana good morning." The use of visual media greatly helps students to associate new vocabulary with real experiences in everyday life.

Students Participation

Student involvement in English vocabulary learning in grade 1 at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot varied from very active to passive. In several meetings, some students showed high enthusiasm, especially when the teacher invited them to sing or participate in interactive games such as Touch the Things I Say. In these activities, students were seen running excitedly to find pictures that matched the teacher's instructions. This indicates that activities combined with physical movement and games are able to attract attention and increase student participation in the learning process.

However, not all students responded in the same way. Based on the results of observations, when learning is only done through explanations or writing on the blackboard, most students tend to be passive and less involved. For example, there were children who appeared to be walking around the classroom, disturbing their friends, and some even hid under the table during learning activities. This phenomenon illustrates the limited attention span of first-grade students, who on average are only able to concentrate for a short period of time. This condition is in line with Harmer's (2001) opinion, which explains that young children tend to lose focus after about the first 10 minutes of learning.

Thus, it can be concluded that student participation in learning is relatively high when teachers use appropriate strategies. Students are more active when learning activities are presented through physical activities, singing, and games. Conversely, when learning is conducted only through explanations or writing on the blackboard, most students tend to be passive and less engaged. Therefore, the level of student engagement is greatly influenced by the creativity of teachers in designing learning activities that are appropriate for young children.

Classroom Management

Classroom management in grade 1 at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot faces challenges typical of early childhood. Observations show that students are often challenging to control, for example, running around the classroom, disturbing their friends, crying, or even hiding under tables. This is consistent with the teacher's statement that "Kelas 1 ini masih seperti anak-anak TK... kadang ada yang berlari, kadang ada yang menangis, kadang juga ada yang tidak mau buka suara."

To maintain a conducive classroom environment, teachers utilize physical activities such as songs, games, and the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. This strategy helps redirect students' energy while improving their focus. Teachers also give simple rewards, such as allowing students to play outside the classroom after

successfully answering questions correctly. In this way, teachers strive to maintain student motivation while reducing distractions during lessons.

Discussion

This section discusses deeply the findings of the study, which are organized around two main research questions. The first part highlights the challenges encountered during the implementation of vocabulary teaching. The second part explores the strategies used by the teacher in teaching vocabulary.

The Challenges in Teaching Vocabulary

Classroom Management

The teacher faced challenges in controlling students' behavior and maintaining their focus due to their short attention spans. Many students were easily distracted and unable to sustain attention, especially during less interactive parts of the lesson. Based on observations on Friday, July 18, 2025, by the teacher, the researcher found that some students were making noise, bothering their classmates, or even hiding under their desks. Students also preferred to play with their friends during class. Teachers had a hard time controlling the class. Therefore, the learning process does not run smoothly. On the other hand, based on an interview with the teacher on Friday, August 8, 2025, she said, "Kelas 1 ini masih seperti anak-anak TK ya, seperti anak usia dini. Jadi tantangan yang biasa kita hadapi saat di kelas ya, kadang anak-anak kurang fokus, kadang ada yang berlari dikelas, kadang ada yang menangis. Nah, itu beberapa kendala kita ketika mengajar di kelas, ya. Kadang juga ada yang tidak mau buka suaranya, yang diam."

Diversity of Mother Tongue

Some students in the class have Sasak as their mother tongue. This condition requires teachers to explain English material not only in Indonesian, but also in Sasak. The practice of translating into two languages poses a challenge in teaching vocabulary, as teachers must ensure that every student truly understands the meaning of the words being taught. This bilingual translation adds complexity to the lesson and takes more time. In addition, the use of more than one language in the learning process requires appropriate teaching strategies to ensure that learning objectives are achieved effectively and efficiently.

Limitation of Facilities and Media

One of the challenges faced by teachers in teaching vocabulary in first grade is the limited media and learning support facilities. Teachers said that most of the media used came from personal initiatives. School facilities for English language learning, especially in first grade, are still minimal. The school only has 1 LCD projectors, so not every class has access to one, and their use must be shared with other classes. As observed during the observation process conducted on August 8, 2025, the teacher initially wanted to use the LCD projector, but since it was being used by another class, she ended up not using it. This limits teachers in utilizing technology-based media such as educational videos, interactive applications, or even PowerPoint presentations. As a result, teachers more frequently use simple media such as printed images, whiteboards, and objects found around the classroom.

The Strategies Used in Teaching Vocabulary

The material used by English teacher in teaching vocabulary at first grade students. In the curriculum, teaching materials play a crucial role as they are designed to support the learning process and ensure that the objectives are achieved. By using appropriate materials, teachers can help students build their knowledge and skills, while also making the lessons easier to understand. To be effective, the materials must be consistent with the lesson plan and syllabus. The materials covered in this study include greetings, introductions, numbers, colors, and things in the classroom.

Teaching method used in teaching English vocabulary at first grade students

Based on the results of observations conducted in the classroom, the researcher observed that English teachers use the TPR (Total Physical Response) method to teach in grade 1. From the results of interviews conducted on Friday, August 8, 2025, the teacher said that "Ya, kalau kelas 1 lebih dominan kita menggunakan total physical respon, ya. Terkadang kita pakai metode-metode yang lain, tetapi untuk dominan anak kelas 1 ini ya TPR karena dia sepertinya masih sibuk dengan dirinya sendiri sehingga kita membutuhkan metode yang menarik perhatian mereka dengan cara gerakan gerakan fisik, seperti begitu". According to Brewster et al. in Ahmadi et al. (2022) said that the relevant language learning methods for early childhood and primary school, must be TPR (Total Physical Response), integrated methods, and practice (Ellis, 1997). Meanwhile, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2013) TPR was developed to reduce the stress that people feel when they learn another language and thus encourage students to persist longer in the learning process beyond their initial proficiency level.

The Techniques used by English teacher in teaching vocabulary at first grade students

From observation and interviews with English teachers, researchers found that teachers used several techniques to teach vocabulary. These techniques included translation, printed picture, and memorization methods. In addition, teachers also gave students the opportunity to come to the front of the class and answer questions in pairs. Details about each technique can be found in the following explanation:

Translation

One technique that is often used in vocabulary learning is translation. Observations on Friday, July 25, 2025, in the first-grade class at SDN 3 Karang Bongkot showed that teachers used two languages when explaining words to students. The material was not delivered entirely in English, but was accompanied by translations into Indonesian to help students understand the meaning of the vocabulary being taught.

Printed Picture

Photos play an important role in connecting students understanding with new material. Photos can help students recognize and learn new vocabulary. Many words can be described through photos. As from research conducted by researchers in class 1 on Friday, July 25, 2025, teachers used printed photos to explain new vocabulary related to greetings such as: good morning, good afternoon, good evening, and good night.

Meanwhile, based on an interview conducted on Tuesday, August 12, 2025, the teacher said "Kalau untuk gambar atau gambar kayak kemarin bulan lalu kita

mengajarkan tentang greeting, itu kita pakai gambar print. Misalkan Seperti pada pembelajaran Tema 1 itu di greeting jadi ada gambar disitu gambar tentang kegiatan orang di pagi hari. Biasa kegiatan pagi hari itu apa sih? Kan ada matahari bersinar Berarti mataharinya disana pagi hari. Nanti kita suruh anak-anak, mana good morning? Maka dia akan sentuh gambar yang good morning tadi. Tetapi kalau sore hari biasanya kan anak bermain, nah itu ada gambar sore hari. Kegiatan malam hari begitu juga saat dia mau tidur berarti gambar anak mau tidur”.

Memorization

To encourage students to acquire new vocabulary, teachers often motivate them while emphasizing the importance of memorizing vocabulary. Teachers believe that mastering a large vocabulary will help students achieve good grades in English. In teaching, teachers apply the memorization method through songs. Songs containing specific vocabulary are sung repeatedly by students at each meeting so that they can remember and understand new vocabulary in an easier and more enjoyable way.

The strategies used by English teacher in teaching vocabulary at first grade students

From interviews with English teachers and observations, researchers found that teachers use several strategies when teaching vocabulary. These strategies include songs and games. Details about each technique are provided in the following explanation:

Song

Phillips (1993) sees music and rhythms as key elements in language learning for young kids, suggesting we use songs that are so catchy they just won't leave their heads. English songs, in particular, offer a fresh and exciting approach to sharpening language abilities and growing vocabulary (Ananda et al. 2023). One of the most common strategies used by teachers in first grade is singing songs. At first, the teacher sings songs to the students. Then, the teacher repeats the songs so that the students can remember new vocabulary. The song is combined with body movements that correspond to the meaning of the lyrics. For example, when saying “good morning,” students are asked to raise their hands. Teachers also apply memorization and translation techniques through these songs. The memorization technique is applied by repeating the song in each meeting until students can remember the vocabulary in the lyrics, while the translation technique is used to strengthen students' understanding by explaining the meaning of words in Indonesian and Sasak. The teacher considers this to be one of the alternative strategies if the students have lost their focus on learning. Based on an interview with the teacher conducted on Friday, August 8, 2025, she said, “Ketika anak anak kelas 1 kehilangan fokus belajar, kita biasanya membuat mereka supaya bangkit lagi semangatnya dengan cara memberikan game-game yang menarik, atau pun melalui lagu-lagu, ataupun sekedar menggerakkan tangannya, seperti begitu.” The songs and games chosen must be easy to remember and easy to do, and must also be tailored to the theme taught by the teacher. Based on an interview with the teacher on Friday, August 8, 2025, she also said, “Kalau lagu tergantung temanya. Itu, tergantung tema yang kita ajarkan, seperti contohnya kalau di semester 2 mengenai greeting, maka kita ajarin tentang lagu greeting, seperti,

Selamat pagi itu good morning

Selamat sore itu good afternoon
Selamat malam itu good evening
Mau bobo bilang good night
Nah, nanti kalau materi yang berikutnya misalkan tentang perkenalan ya, kita pakai lagu tentang perkenalan, yang simpel-simpel.

What is your name?

My name is John

Misalnya seperti itu, terus kita tanya satu satu dan mereka menjawab dengan nama mereka sendiri."

The teacher and students sing the song repeatedly so that the students can remember the new vocabulary. Once the teacher feels that the students have memorized the song, she sings the song and leaves some of the lyrics blank, which the students then fill in.

Games

Teaching early childhood and primary school should be fun and dramatic (Brewster et al., 2002). Fun vocabulary learning should involve games and songs with simple tones that are easy for students to follow (Arafiq et al., 2022). The use of games in vocabulary teaching has been shown to enhance motivation, vocabulary mastery, and English proficiency among primary school students (Wang et al., 2011). Students will be interested and not feel bored with the lesson. These games must also be easy for students to follow and appropriate for children in grade 1. In the second observation conducted by the researcher on Friday, July 25 2025, the teacher used printed pictures, including pictures of good morning, good afternoon, good evening, and good night. The first thing the teacher did after the opening activity was to show the pictures and explain what they depicted. Then, the teacher invited the students to play a game called "Touch the things I say." The teacher placed the pictures at various points around the classroom. Beforehand, the teacher explained the rules and gave examples of the game to the students. For example, the teacher said, "Good morning" so the children had to find and touch the picture according to the instructions, the picture of good morning. This activity makes students physically and mentally active, because they not only listen, but also think quickly, move, and touch according to instructions. In this game, the teacher involves the students' senses of hearing, body movement, seeing and touching. Based on observations, this strategy is able to increase the attention and enthusiasm of students who were initially challenging to control. In an interview with the teacher on Friday, August 8, 2025, she said "Ya. Seperti di minggu lalu juga. Ya, di minggu lalu kita menggunakan game, misalkan kita taruh gambar kegiatan di pagi hari, maka anak harus menyentuh. Mana sih yang namanya good morning? Ah, dia balap-balapan menyentuh gambar yang sesuai dengan yang kita ucapkan".

CONCLUSION

There are three aspects of challenges that English teacher faced to teach vocabulary to first grade students: classroom management, diversity of mother tongue, and limitation of facilities and media. These conditions often make the teaching process less effective if the teacher does not use the right approach. To

address these challenges, the teacher relied on strategies that matched the learning needs of young learners, especially first graders. Among these strategies was the Total Physical Response through songs and games supported with translation, memorization, and visual aids like printed pictures, which helped students grasp and retain new vocabulary more effectively. By combining these approaches, the teacher was able to capture students' attention and create lessons that felt fun, engaging, and meaningful. Therefore, it can be concluded that the success of vocabulary learning in early grades strongly depends on the teacher's ability to combine methods, techniques, and media that match the characteristics of young learners. When strategies are applied in a creative and playful way, students become more motivated, active, and confident in learning English vocabulary. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that teachers use creative and interactive strategies (such as songs, games, and TPR) with simple media, schools provide adequate facilities and training, students utilize these strategies to strengthen vocabulary mastery, and future researchers develop this research further on aspects of teaching that have not been explored.

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