

EXPLORING SPELLING BEE IN VOCABULARY LEARNING AT AN EQUIVALENCE EDUCATION INSTITUTION : STUDENTS' VIEWS

Luluk Nur Fadhillah^{*}, Mansyur Srisudarso, Mobit

English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang

Email: 2010631060098@student.unsika.ac.id

Abstract

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions and challenges in learning vocabulary through the Spelling Bee method at an equivalency education institution. The research employed a qualitative case study approach involving students from a non-formal education program. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students generally had positive perceptions toward the implementation of the Spelling Bee method. The activity increased students' motivation and interest in learning English by creating a fun, interactive, and engaging learning environment. In addition, the method helped students improve their vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and spelling skills through repeated practice and active participation. Some students also reported that the method supported them in constructing simple sentences, although difficulties in grammar and sentence structure remained. Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified, including anxiety and nervousness during the activity, difficulty in spelling and pronunciation, limited vocabulary knowledge, and challenges in constructing sentences. The findings also highlighted the importance of teacher and peer support in helping students overcome learning difficulties. Overall, the study concludes that the Spelling Bee method is an effective and enjoyable strategy for vocabulary learning in equivalency education, although additional instructional support is still needed to maximize students' language development.

Keywords: Equivalency Education, Spelling Bee, Students' Perception, Vocabulary Learning, Vocabulary Mastery

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, mastering the English language has become increasingly important, especially in the context of international communication and the job market. One fundamental aspect of learning English is vocabulary mastery. In the process of learning English, vocabulary cannot be separated from the important elements in language skills (Darwis N, 2022). A good vocabulary not only supports speaking and writing skills but is also crucial for understanding reading texts and listening. Without vocabulary mastery, students will struggle to communicate effectively, which can hinder their achievement of the communication competencies required in this global era.

In Indonesia, although the government enforces a nine-year compulsory education policy, not all students are able to complete formal schooling due to economic hardship, living in areas with limited access to education, or family-related responsibilities. As a result, many learners drop out and later seek alternative education paths. To fulfill their right to education, equivalency education institutions such as package A, B, and C programs have been established to accommodate those who could not complete formal schooling. These programs are designed to serve learners from diverse social and economic backgrounds (Shofwan, 2021). However, a significant challenge within these programs is students' low motivation and limited interest in learning English, often stemming from less engaging and monotonous learning experiences (Darwis, 2022).

One method that can enhance students' interest and motivation in vocabulary learning is through educational games, such as Spelling Bee. Pusparini (2020) states that Spelling Bee not only helps students improve their spelling skills but also improves their memory of the vocabulary learned. Additionally, Liando and Mozes (2020) add that the use of educational games can make students more curious and motivate them to be more active in the learning process. However, research on the use of Spelling Bee in the context of equivalency education in Indonesia is still limited, with most existing studies focusing on formal schools.

Recent studies have indicated that the Spelling Bee game significantly enhances vocabulary mastery among students in equivalency education institutions. For instance, a study by Qomariyah et al. (2020) demonstrated a significant difference in vocabulary achievement between students taught using the Spelling Bee method and those who were not, highlighting the effectiveness of this approach. Similarly, research conducted by Windasari (2023) found that the implementation of the Spelling Bee method increased student participation in learning, which positively impacted their overall learning outcomes. Furthermore, a study by Rahmawati (2023) emphasized that participation in Spelling Bee activities can enhance students' confidence in using English, an essential factor in vocabulary mastery. Collectively, these studies suggest that the Spelling Bee method not only improves vocabulary skills but also fosters greater engagement and self-assurance among students, making it a valuable tool in the context of equivalency education. The implementation of Spelling Bee in Indonesian formal schools also demonstrates promising results. Padidi et al. (2022) found that this activity improved vocabulary mastery among students of SMP Negeri 8 Makassar. Similar findings by Rahmawati (2023) indicate that Spelling Bee fosters a more enjoyable and interactive learning atmosphere, contributing to better vocabulary retention. Furthermore, Windasari et al. (2023) emphasize that learning vocabulary through Spelling Bee encourages linguistic creativity and significantly improves student achievement. On the other hand, International findings further reinforce these results. Shafiq and Usaini (2024), in an experimental study at the Kano State, demonstrated that the Spelling Bee effectively enhanced students' vocabulary learning outcomes. Additionally, Ghallab (2020), through a mixed-methods study in Saudi Arabia, showed that the mobile-based game *The English Bee* improved students' spelling accuracy, pronunciation awareness, and positive attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. These findings emphasize that integrating games like Spelling Bee into English instruction can enhance vocabulary learning and student engagement across educational contexts.

These findings align with the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes project-based, participatory, and contextual learning across both formal and non-formal education. According

to the Kemendikbud (UU Sisdiknas), the non-formal education curriculum serves as a guideline for learning implementation (Fauzi et al., 2024). In the context of equivalency education, Spelling Bee can be considered an innovative strategy supporting English literacy competence in line with the Capaian Pembelajaran (CP) and Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Thus, the method is pedagogically relevant and consistent with the national educational direction emphasizing active, collaborative, and learner-centered approaches. However, research specifically exploring the application of Spelling Bee in non-formal education remains scarce.

The gap in this research in the population of students in equivalency education institutions, who have unique characteristics such as diverse ages, different educational backgrounds, and varying levels of motivation. Previous research has not extensively explored how students in equivalency education perceive and experience vocabulary learning through the Spelling Bee method. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' views on the use of Spelling Bee in vocabulary mastery at equivalency education institutions, with the hope of providing new insights and contributions to the development of more effective and engaging teaching strategies for students with diverse learning needs.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method. A qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to understand and investigate human experiences within individual and group contexts to find meaning (Creswell, 2009). To collect data in research activities and for narrative research, researchers use interviews and documentation. Researchers conduct interviews to find out students' perspectives on the implementation of spelling bee in students' vocabulary mastery. After conducting interviews, researchers get the results of students' answers regarding perceptions of the implementation of spelling bee in vocabulary mastery. The data analysis in this study employed the thematic analysis approach as outlined by Barkhuizen et al. (2013). This method was selected because the research involved multiple participants and produced a substantial amount of narrative data that required systematic categorization. During the initial interview sessions, the researcher recorded the participants' responses with their permission. The recorded data were then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness. The transcripts were carefully read several times to gain a deep understanding of the content before being coded to identify meaningful patterns. Following the coding process, the data were organized into categories and subsequently grouped into themes and sub-themes that reflected the main findings related to the research questions. After the thematic structure was established, a comprehensive report was developed to interpret the results. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher compared the spoken narratives with the written transcripts to confirm consistency. Once the data were verified, the findings were presented narratively and supported by relevant theoretical frameworks.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study, including a detailed description, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected from the participants. The findings are presented to address the research questions and to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In particular, this chapter explores: (1) students' perceptions of vocabulary learning through the implementation of the Spelling Bee method, and (2) the challenges experienced by students in the process of learning vocabulary using the Spelling Bee method.

Finding

This section presents the findings of the study based on the formulated research questions. The findings are divided into two main parts. The first part discusses students' perceptions of vocabulary learning through the use of the Spelling Bee method. The second part focuses on the challenges encountered by students when using the Spelling Bee method in vocabulary learning. Each finding is presented and supported by data obtained from the interviews, followed by analysis and interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research results.

1. Students' Perceptions of Vocabulary Learning Using Spelling Bee

Based on the interview results, students generally showed positive perceptions toward the use of the Spelling Bee method. Several themes emerged from the data as follows:

a. Students' Motivation and Interest in Learning English

The findings reveal that the implementation of the Spelling Bee method significantly enhances students' motivation and interest in learning English. Initially, some students perceived English as difficult and less enjoyable due to its unfamiliarity. For instance, one student described English as difficult and not enjoyable. However, after participating in the Spelling Bee activity, the student reported a noticeable shift in perception, describing the experience as enjoyable and engaging. This transformation suggests that the incorporation of game-based elements in learning can reduce students' negative perceptions and help develop a more positive attitude toward the subject.

Moreover, other students consistently described the activity as "seru" (fun) and "ra" (enjoyable), indicating that the Spelling Bee created an emotionally engaging learning environment. The presence of competition, interaction, and immediate feedback appears to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Spelling Bee method plays a crucial role in transforming passive learners into active participants by making the learning process more dynamic and enjoyable.

b. Students' Experiences in Developing Vocabulary Mastery

Another prominent finding is the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery through the Spelling Bee method. The students reported that they were able to recognize, remember, and recall vocabulary more effectively after participating in the activity. This improvement is closely related to the repetitive nature of spelling, where students are required to hear, process, and reproduce words multiple times.

For example, students mentioned that spelling words letter by letter helped them understand and remember vocabulary more easily. Unlike traditional memorization, which

often relies on passive recall, the Spelling Bee activity allows students to participate more active in the learning process. Students also mentioned several words they learned during the activity, such as “book,” “watermelon,” “kiwi,” and “apple.” This indicates that the method not only introduces new vocabulary but also reinforces retention.

Furthermore, the process of spelling words aloud allows students to connect the written and spoken forms of language, which supports students in developing their lexical knowledge. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Spelling Bee method is effective in enhancing vocabulary mastery through active engagement and repeated exposure.

c. Students’ Experiences in Developing Pronunciation and Spelling Skills

The findings also indicate that the Spelling Bee method contributes to the improvement of students’ pronunciation and spelling skills. Through the activity, students are required to listen carefully to the pronunciation of words and reproduce them accurately through spelling. This process helps students develop phonological awareness, which is essential in learning a foreign language.

Students reported that they became more familiar with how words are pronounced and spelled, particularly through repeated practice. For instance, one student mentioned that spelling and pronouncing words simultaneously made the vocabulary easier to remember. Additionally, learning the alphabet pronunciation was highlighted as an important outcome, as it serves as the foundation for accurate spelling.

These experiences suggest that the Spelling Bee activity involves listening, speaking, and cognitive processing skills, reflecting a more integrated learning experience in vocabulary learning. Students not only became familiar with the words but also showed an understanding of how the words are pronounced and spelled.

d. Support in Constructing Simple Sentences

In addition to vocabulary acquisition, the findings show that the Spelling Bee method provides some support in helping students construct simple sentences. Several students reported that after learning vocabulary through spelling, they were able to use the words in basic sentence structures. For example, students produced simple sentences such as “I have a book,” indicating that vocabulary knowledge can facilitate sentence construction.

However, this improvement was not experienced equally by all participants. Some students reported that they still struggled with sentence structure and word selection, even though they understood the meaning of individual words. This suggests that while vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component of language learning, it does not automatically lead to grammatical competence.

These findings suggest that the Spelling Bee activity supports students’ lexical development, which can help them in constructing sentences. However, students may still need additional support to develop their grammatical skills and form more complex sentences.

e. Creating a Fun and Interactive Learning Environment

Another important finding is that the Spelling Bee method creates a fun and interactive learning environment. All participants agreed that the learning atmosphere became more enjoyable compared to traditional teaching methods. The use of games, competition, and group participation contributed to a lively classroom environment where students felt more engaged.

Students described the learning situation as “ramai-ramai” (learning together) and “menarik” (interesting), which indicates a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. This interactive environment encourages students to participate actively, share ideas, and support each other during the activity.

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the game requires students to think quickly and respond actively, which enhances their cognitive engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Spelling Bee method not only improves academic outcomes but also positively influences the overall classroom atmosphere, making learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

2. Students’ Challenges in Using Spelling Bee

Despite the positive perceptions, several challenges were identified from the students’ responses.

a. Anxiety and Nervousness

Despite the positive perceptions, the findings reveal that many students experienced anxiety and nervousness during the Spelling Bee activity. This emotional response was mainly caused by the competitive nature of the game, where students were required to perform in front of their peers and respond quickly.

Students expressed feelings of being “deg-degan” (nervous), “panik” (tense), and even “panik” (panicked), especially when they were afraid of making mistakes or losing the game. This indicates that performance pressure can negatively affect students’ confidence and participation.

However, it is important to note that this anxiety does not necessarily hinder learning. In some cases, it may also motivate students to perform better. Therefore, teachers need to carefully manage classroom dynamics to ensure that the competition remains supportive rather than intimidating.

b. Difficulty in Spelling and Pronunciation

Another significant challenge identified in the findings is students’ difficulty in spelling and pronouncing English words. This difficulty is particularly evident when students encounter unfamiliar words or words with complex spelling patterns.

Students reported confusion in distinguishing vowel sounds and difficulty in matching pronunciation with spelling. This challenge is likely influenced by the differences between the English language and the students’ first language, which may have more consistent spelling patterns.

Additionally, some students mentioned specific words that were difficult to spell or pronounce, indicating that vocabulary complexity plays a role in their learning difficulties. Therefore, it can be concluded that while Spelling Bee provides practice opportunities, students still require guidance and support to overcome linguistic challenges.

c. Limited Vocabulary Knowledge

The findings also show that limited vocabulary knowledge remains a challenge for students during the Spelling Bee activity. When students encounter unfamiliar words, they often struggle to participate confidently and accurately.

This limitation affects not only their performance in the game but also their overall learning experience. Students who have a broader vocabulary are more likely to succeed and feel confident, while those with limited vocabulary may feel discouraged.

Therefore, it is important for teachers to provide sufficient vocabulary exposure and preparation before conducting Spelling Bee activities. Pre-teaching vocabulary can help students feel more prepared and reduce anxiety during the activity.

d. Difficulty in Constructing Sentences

Another challenge identified is students' difficulty in constructing sentences, even after learning vocabulary through the Spelling Bee method. While students may understand the meaning of individual words, they often struggle to combine them into grammatically correct sentences.

This difficulty is mainly related to limited knowledge of grammar, sentence structure, and word usage. As a result, students may rely on simple or incomplete sentence forms, or they may avoid constructing sentences altogether.

This finding suggests that vocabulary learning alone is not sufficient for developing overall language proficiency. Therefore, Spelling Bee activities should be complemented with grammar instruction and sentence-building exercises to support students' language development.

e. Need for Teacher and Peer Support

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of teacher and peer support in the learning process. Many students expressed that they still needed assistance when facing difficulties during the Spelling Bee activity.

Support from teachers helps students understand difficult words, correct their mistakes, and build confidence. Meanwhile, peer support creates a collaborative learning environment where students can learn from each other.

This indicates that learning is a social process, and students benefit from interaction and guidance. Therefore, the role of the teacher is crucial in facilitating learning and ensuring that all students can participate effectively.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research questions and previous studies. The discussion highlights how the results of this research confirm, extend, and provide new insights into the existing literature on the use of the Spelling Bee method in vocabulary learning.

1. Students' Perceptions of Vocabulary Learning Using Spelling Bee

The findings of this study indicate that students generally have positive perceptions toward the use of the Spelling Bee method in vocabulary learning. This result is consistent with several previous studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness of Spelling Bee in improving students' motivation, engagement, and vocabulary mastery.

Firstly, the increase in students' motivation and interest found in this study supports the findings of Sari (2022), who reported that the use of Spelling Bee activities enhanced students' participation and motivation in learning English. In this study, students described the activity as “seru” and “menyenangkan,” and even students who initially disliked English showed a positive change in attitude after participating in the activity. This suggests that the game-based nature of Spelling Bee creates a more enjoyable and less intimidating learning environment, which encourages students to become more actively involved in the learning process.

Similarly, this finding is also in line with Rahmawati (2023), who found that Spelling Bee activities increased students' confidence in using English. In the present study, although some students initially felt nervous, they still showed enthusiasm and willingness to participate. This indicates that the Spelling Bee method not only motivates students but also gradually builds their confidence through repeated practice and participation.

Secondly, the improvement in vocabulary mastery identified in this study confirms the findings of Qomariyah et al. (2021) and Padidi et al. (2022), who found that students taught using the Spelling Bee method achieved better vocabulary outcomes compared to those who used conventional methods. In this study, students were able to recall and mention vocabulary such as book, watermelon, kiwi, and apple, indicating that the method effectively supports vocabulary retention. This result suggests that the repetition and active involvement in spelling activities strengthen students' memory and understanding of vocabulary.

Furthermore, the findings also support Mutiara (2023) and Windasari et al. (2023), who emphasized that Spelling Bee creates an interactive learning environment that enhances vocabulary retention and linguistic development. In this study, students highlighted that learning through Spelling Bee was more engaging because it involved group interaction, competition, and active participation. This interactive environment plays an important role in facilitating meaningful learning experiences.

In addition, the improvement in pronunciation and spelling skills observed in this study is consistent with international findings. For example, Huynh (2024) found that the Spelling Bee game improved students' vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation skills among EFL learners in Vietnam. Similarly, Ghallab (2020) reported that game-based spelling activities enhanced students' spelling accuracy and pronunciation awareness. The present study supports these findings, as students reported that spelling words letter by letter helped them understand pronunciation and word formation more clearly.

Moreover, this study also found that Spelling Bee can support students in constructing simple sentences, although this ability remains limited. This finding partially aligns with Garcia

and Hernandez (2016), who found that students participating in Spelling Bee activities showed improvement in vocabulary mastery and interest in learning English. However, the present study adds a more nuanced perspective by showing that while vocabulary improves, students still struggle with sentence structure and grammar. This suggests that vocabulary acquisition does not automatically lead to full language proficiency, highlighting the need for integrated language instruction.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the existing literature that Spelling Bee is an effective and engaging method for improving vocabulary learning. At the same time, this study provides additional insight by focusing on students' perceptions in an equivalency education context, which has been less explored in previous research.

2. Students' Challenges in Using Spelling Bee

In addition to positive perceptions, this study also identified several challenges faced by students when using the Spelling Bee method. These findings both support and extend previous research on difficulties in learning English.

One of the main challenges identified is students' anxiety and nervousness during the activity. This finding is consistent with Aslamiah (2020), who emphasized that emotional factors such as anxiety can affect students' performance in learning English. In this study, students reported feeling "deg-degan" and "panik," especially when they were required to perform in front of others. This suggests that while the competitive nature of Spelling Bee can be motivating, it may also create pressure that affects students' confidence.

Another challenge is students' difficulty in spelling and pronunciation. This finding aligns with Ghallab (2020) and Huynh (2024), who noted that although Spelling Bee improves spelling and pronunciation skills, learners may initially struggle with unfamiliar words and complex spelling patterns. In the present study, students reported confusion in distinguishing vowel sounds and difficulty in connecting pronunciation with spelling. This indicates that differences between English and students' first language remain a significant barrier in vocabulary learning.

Furthermore, limited vocabulary knowledge was identified as a challenge in this study. This finding supports previous research that emphasizes the importance of vocabulary as a foundation for language learning. As highlighted by Maduwu (2016), vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in developing students' communication skills. In this study, students with limited vocabulary found it more difficult to participate confidently in the Spelling Bee activity, which suggests that prior vocabulary knowledge influences students' learning experiences.

In addition, the difficulty in constructing sentences found in this study supports the idea that mastering vocabulary alone is not sufficient for achieving overall language proficiency. While previous studies, such as Qomariyah et al. (2021), focused on measurable improvements in vocabulary, the present study provides deeper insight into students' learning experiences by showing that grammatical competence remains a challenge. This finding highlights the importance of integrating vocabulary learning with grammar instruction.

Finally, the need for teacher and peer support identified in this study reinforces the importance of guidance in the learning process. This is in line with the general view in language learning research that teacher support plays a crucial role in helping students overcome difficulties. Students in this study expressed the need for assistance when facing challenging

words, which indicates that scaffolding is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of the Spelling Bee method.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions and challenges in learning vocabulary using the Spelling Bee method at an equivalency education institution. Based on the findings and discussion presented in Chapter IV, several conclusions can be drawn in relation to the research questions.

First, regarding students' perceptions, the findings show that the Spelling Bee method is generally perceived positively by students. The implementation of this method successfully increases students' motivation and interest in learning English. Students who initially perceived English as difficult and uninteresting demonstrated a change in attitude after participating in the activity. The game-based nature of the Spelling Bee creates a fun, interactive, and engaging learning environment that encourages active participation.

In addition, the Spelling Bee method contributes to the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery. Through repeated exposure, spelling practice, and active involvement, students are able to remember and recognize vocabulary more effectively. The method also supports the development of pronunciation and spelling skills, as students become more familiar with the relationship between sounds and written forms of words.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the Spelling Bee method provides some support in helping students construct simple sentences. However, this improvement is still limited, as some students continue to experience difficulties in understanding sentence structure and grammar. This suggests that while the method is effective in enhancing vocabulary, it does not fully address all aspects of language learning.

Second, regarding the challenges faced by students, the study reveals several important issues. Many students experience anxiety and nervousness during the activity, mainly due to the competitive nature of the game and the pressure to perform in front of others. In addition, students face difficulties in spelling and pronunciation, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar words and complex spelling patterns.

Another challenge identified is students' limited vocabulary knowledge, which affects their confidence and participation in the activity. Moreover, students still encounter difficulties in constructing sentences, indicating that vocabulary mastery alone is not sufficient for developing overall language proficiency. Finally, the findings highlight the importance of teacher and peer support, as students still require guidance to overcome learning difficulties.

Overall, this study concludes that the Spelling Bee method is an effective and engaging strategy for improving students' vocabulary learning. However, its implementation should be supported by appropriate teaching strategies to address the challenges faced by students and to maximize its effectiveness.

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