

INFLUENTIAL FACTORS TO STUDENT'S DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH VOCABULARY AT NAMDINH UNIVERSITY OF NURSING

Pham Thi Hoang Ngan^{1*}, Pham Thu Hien²

¹Namdingh University of Nursing, ²University of Economics-Technology for Industries

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 17/01/2025</p> <p>Revised: 31/3/2025</p> <p>Published: 31/3/2025</p>	<p>Mastering English vocabulary seems to be easy, however, it is actually more challenging than people think. This paper aims to explore the difficulties students encounter when learning vocabulary and also investigates the underlying reasons for their difficulties. The participants were 101 students in the second year at Namdingh University of Nursing. The questionnaire surveys, observation and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data for the paper. The findings showed that students faced some main problems like pronunciation, spelling, word meanings and memorization when learning new vocabulary. Besides, some factors causing difficulties in mastering vocabulary were also claimed by the students. These objective factors include the differences between the written and spoken forms in English, differences in English and Vietnamese pronunciation, an excessive number of new words in a lesson and a lack of practice during the lesson. Subjective factors consist of students' limited time using new words, lack of knowledge of the equivalent topic in English, having difficulties in concentrating as well as absence of strategies for learning new words.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Factor</p> <p>English vocabulary</p> <p>Difficulty</p> <p>Vocabulary retention</p> <p>Influence</p>	

CÁC YẾU TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG ĐẾN NHỮNG KHÓ KHĂN CỦA SINH VIÊN TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC ĐIỀU DƯỠNG NAM ĐỊNH TRONG VIỆC HỌC TỪ VỰNG TIẾNG ANH

Phạm Thị Hoàng Ngân^{1*}, Phạm Thu Hiền²

¹Trường Đại học Điều dưỡng Nam Định, ²Trường Đại học Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
<p>Ngày nhận bài: 17/01/2025</p> <p>Ngày hoàn thiện: 31/3/2025</p> <p>Ngày đăng: 31/3/2025</p>	<p>Việc nắm vững từ vựng tiếng Anh có vẻ dễ dàng, tuy nhiên thực tế lại khó hơn nhiều so với suy nghĩ của mọi người. Bài nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu những khó khăn sinh viên gặp phải khi học từ vựng và điều tra những nguyên nhân dẫn đến những khó khăn đó. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu là 101 sinh viên năm thứ hai tại trường Đại học Điều Dưỡng Nam Định. Tác giả đã sử dụng bảng câu hỏi, quan sát và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc để thu thập dữ liệu cho nghiên cứu. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên gặp phải một số vấn đề chính như phát âm, viết đúng chính tả từ, hiểu nghĩa của từ và ghi nhớ từ mới khi học từ vựng. Bên cạnh đó, một số yếu tố gây nên những khó khăn trong việc nắm vững từ vựng cũng được sinh viên nêu ra. Các yếu tố khách quan gồm có sự khác biệt giữa hình thức viết và nói trong tiếng Anh, sự khác biệt trong cách phát âm tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, quá nhiều từ mới trong một bài học và thiếu thực hành trong buổi học. Các yếu tố chủ quan bao gồm: sinh viên thiếu thời gian sử dụng từ mới, kiến thức về chủ đề tương đương trong tiếng Anh, khó khăn trong việc tập trung cũng như không có chiến lược học từ mới.</p>
<p>TỪ KHÓA</p> <p>Yếu tố</p> <p>Từ vựng Tiếng Anh</p> <p>Khó khăn</p> <p>Ghi nhớ từ vựng</p> <p>Sự ảnh hưởng</p>	

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.11920>

* Corresponding author. Email: phamhoangnganndun@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Language is an extremely important tool for people to communicate. It is not only a means to convey thoughts and ideas, but also to build friendships, economic relationships, and cultural and social relationships. Following the development trend, English has become an international language and is widely used in many countries around the world including Vietnam. In Vietnam, English has been taught as a compulsory subject at most universities. Most of the students have been taught English since they were in grade 3. However, after nearly ten years learning English, they still meet plenty of difficulties in mastering it, especially in terms of vocabulary, which is quite poor.

According to Yang et al. [1], language acquisition cannot take place without studying its lexis with unlimited shifts in meaning caused by various contextual variables. Also, Pan et al. [2] believed that vocabulary is one of the most essential components, along with phonetics/pronunciation and grammar, required in learning foreign languages. In learning a mother tongue or any foreign language, it is unable to achieve any language proficiency without learning vocabulary. The authors in [3] documented that without a proportional amount of vocabulary, people will get trouble in listening, reading, speaking and writing. David Wilkins [4] stated that “without grammar, very little information can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed.” Similarly, Naeem Afzal [5] stated that “In fact, the learners’ ability to communicate effectively depends on a good knowledge of vocabulary, which they continue to expand throughout their life span.”

However, plenty of learners are confronted with recalling difficulties, as they tend to forget the word quickly that they have just learnt. Many researchers including cognitivists and psychologists as well as educators have carried out studies to deal with these issues. Reztia et al. [3] addressed that enriching vocabulary looks easy, but it is possible that students encounter difficulties in enriching vocabulary. Additionally, their result of study showed students complained about pronunciation, unfamiliar words, and memorize as their difficulties in enriching vocabulary. The findings of Susanto’s [6] study also revealed that the students still faced the problems or difficulties in vocabulary learning. But the kinds of difficulties faced by students in vocabulary learning were various. Apart from pronouncing the words, confusing in using the word based on the context, words or expression that were idiomatic, they found difficulties in choosing the appropriate meaning of the words and how to write and spell, the different grammatical form of a word known as inflections. Moreover, he showed the factors that cause these difficulties as the written form is different from the spoken form in English, the number of words that students need to learn is exceedingly large, the limitations of sources of information about words, and the complexity of word knowledge. Knowing a word involves much more than understanding its dictionary definition. A lack of understanding of the grammatical form of the words and the incorrect pronunciation are often caused by the lack of sound similarity between English and students’ native language. Whereas, Abuhabil et al. [7] added that “some students faced difficulties when they learn new English vocabulary, because the teachers do not use strategies that facilitate learning new English vocabulary. Moreover, they do not use ways that motivate students to interact inside the classroom.” The study [8] identified effective retention or memorization of vocabulary as students’ difficulties in learning vocabulary.

Dao Dieu Linh [9] from VietNam, in her study showed that both students’ side (subjective factor) including their interest in learning and objective side that consists of means and equipment serving students’ English learning activities are the factors that have the greatest influence on the level of students’ memorization of words.

To be a teacher of English, the writer feels worried when observing that the students seem to easily forget the vocabulary they have just learnt as well as they are afraid of learning new words. Moreover, many students blamed that they do not have rich vocabulary, even some of them said

they cannot remember five words in one hour at home. Thus, the writer wants to find out the students' difficulties and factors causing difficulties in learning vocabulary so that teachers of English in common will have suitable methods of teaching vocabulary helping their students improve their vocabulary effectively.

2. Methodology

To collect data for the study, a qualitative action research with observation, semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire survey in Vietnamese were used in this study. At first 120 students were asked to answer surveys in the Google form. However, only 101 of them answered the questions in it. These participants were the second year students majoring in nursing at Nam Dinh University of Nursing and they had attended the first English course in the three courses they have to learn at the university. For the semi-structured interview, only 15 students were randomly chosen.

3. Results and discussions

3.1. The importance of learning English vocabulary

Before expressing the difficulties and factors causing the difficulties in learning English vocabulary, the students had given their opinions about the importance of learning English vocabulary in the process of using English.

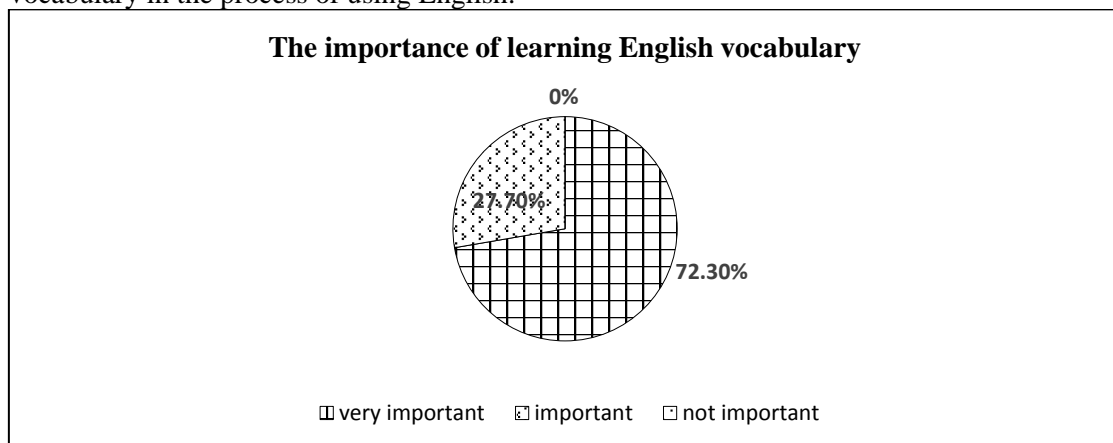


Figure 1. *The importance of learning English vocabulary*

As can be seen from Figure 1, 72.30% of the students found that learning vocabulary was very important in learning English and 27.70% believed that it was important. Noone found it unimportant. However, from the observation we found that although students were aware of the importance of learning vocabulary, they learnt them ineffectively. Therefore, finding out the difficulties they got and what caused their difficulties was necessary.

3.2. The difficulties in learning English Vocabulary

The paper focused on the student's vocabulary-learning problems and the findings. As can be seen in Figure 2, more than half of the students (53.5%) found learning English vocabulary quite difficult and 42% believed it very difficult. Only 3.9% claimed that they have less difficulties.

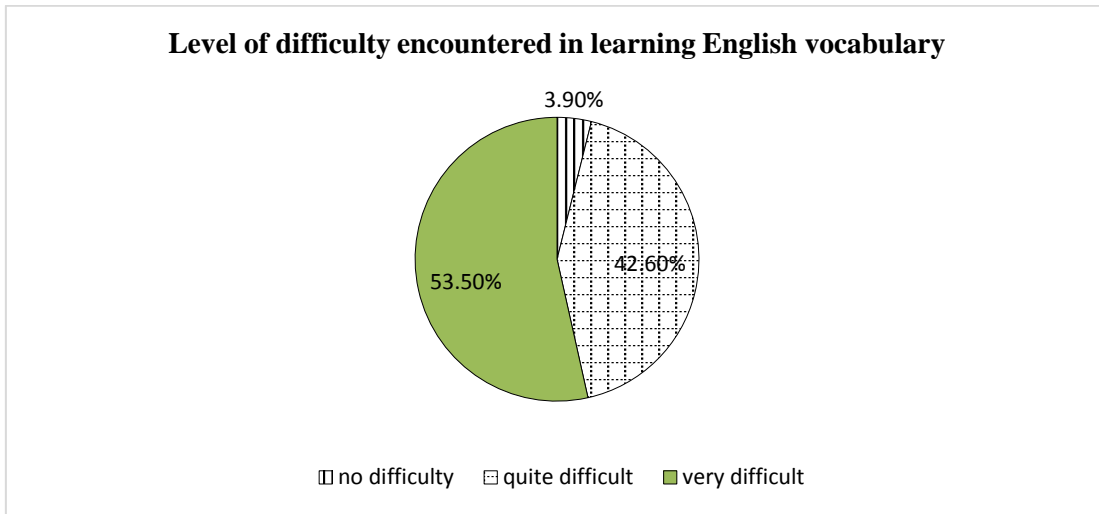


Figure 2. The level of difficulty in learning English vocabulary

Although students had different levels of difficulty in learning English vocabulary, they had a lot of similarities in facing problems.

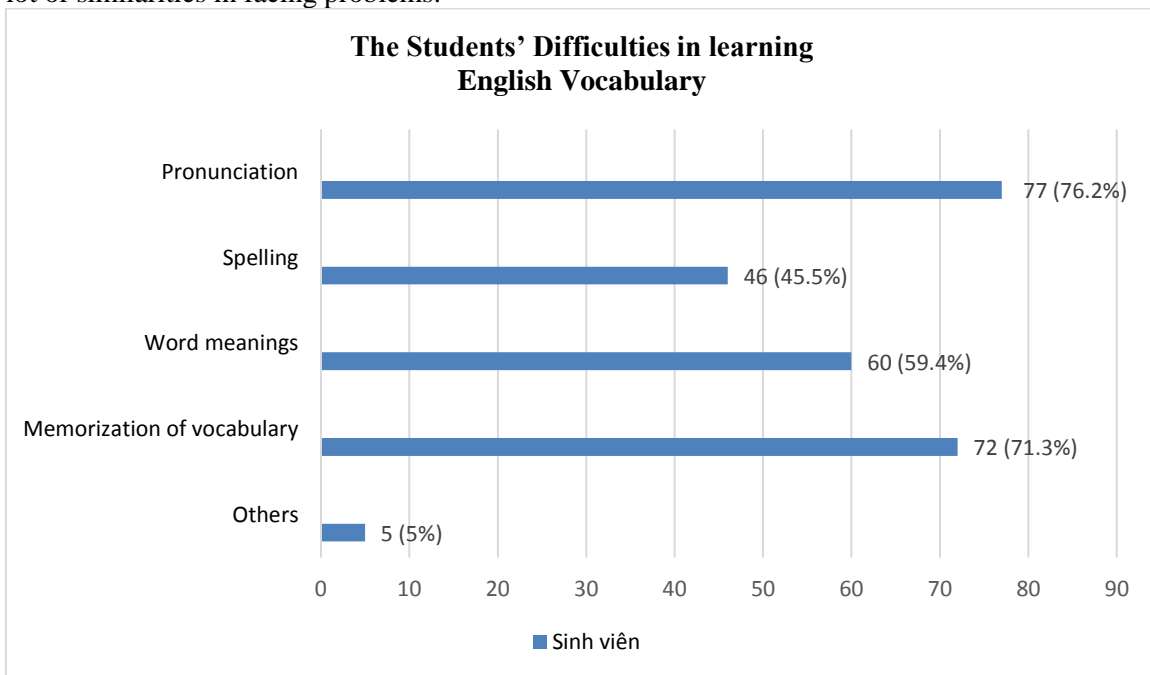


Figure 3. The students' difficulties in learning English vocabulary

From Figure 3, it can be seen that most students (77 of whom) faced the problem in “Pronouncing new words”. In the research carried out by Naeem Afzal [5], his result also indicated that 55% of the participants faced this difficulty. However, it was not as high as it was in the result we found. As the findings indicated, “Memorizing new vocabulary” was recorded in a high number right after the “Pronouncing new vocabulary” problem. 72 students (accounted for 71.3%) claimed that they faced this difficulty when learning new words. The students in the research by Rosyada et al. [8] found that they struggled with remembering a large amount of the vocabulary. In the categories the writers suggested, the difficulty in “Learning meaning of new word” is higher than the one in “Spelling new word”, respectively 60 students (45.5%) and 46

students (49.4%). Apart from these difficulties, only 5 of them claimed other problems they faced such as identifying grammatical structure of words, words or expressions that were idiomatic.

3.3. The factors causing the difficulties in learning English vocabulary

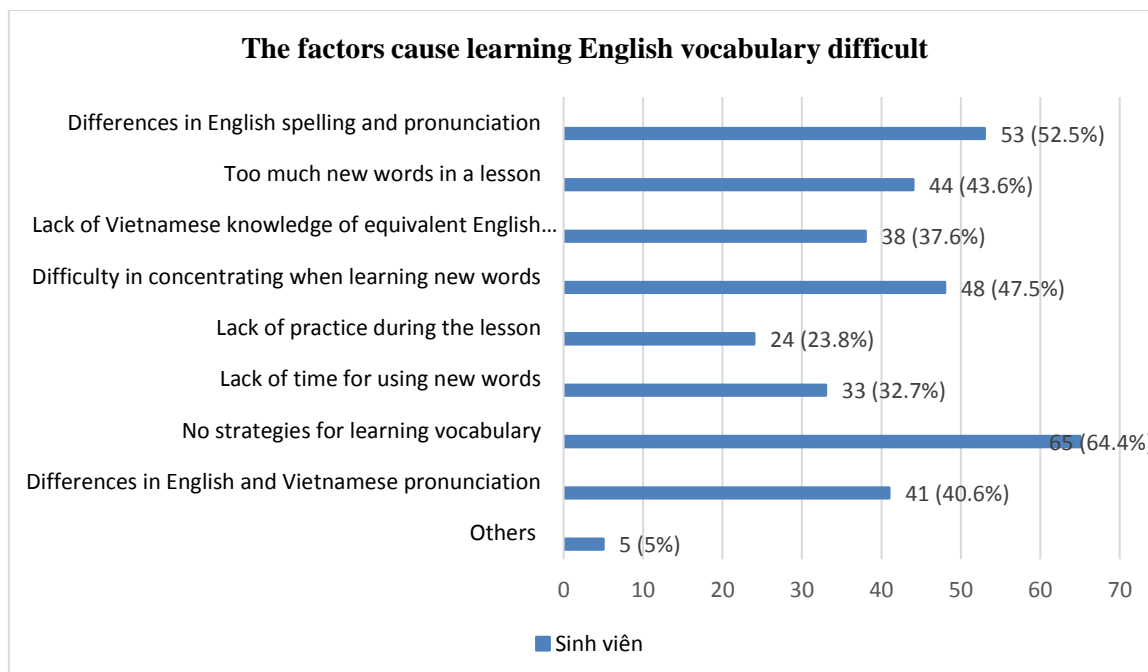


Figure 4. The factors causing difficulties in learning English vocabulary

Most students understand the importance of learning vocabulary. However, plenty of them found it difficult to learn well because of both subjective and objective factors.

The subjective factor which most students (65 students, accounting for 64.4%) considered to be the reason causing their difficulties was that they did not have strategies to learn new words effectively. 48 students (accounted for 47.5%) believed that they were not able to concentrate on learning English vocabulary. Besides, 33 students (equivalent 32.7%) did not spend enough time to use the new words they had learned. 38 students (accounted for 37.6%) indicated another subjective factor was that they lacked knowledge of Vietnamese about English topics in relevance.

The objective factors were the difference between the English spelling and pronunciation, the presence of too many new words in each lesson, a lack of practice new words during the lesson, and the dissimilarity between Vietnamese and English sounds. These problems were indicated by 53 students (52.5%), 44 students (43.6%), 24 students (23.8%), 41 students (40.6%), respectively. Except for these factors given by the writers when asking students about the factor causing difficulties, a lack of understanding of grammatical structure of words and a lack of interest were added more by 5 students (5%).

These results are in line with the research carried out by Susanto [6], including difference between written form and spoken forms in English, the overwhelming number of words that students need to learn, and the lack of phonetic similarity between English and students' native language. However, some other factors were different from the findings in this paper.

The findings from the observation and interviews were quite similar to the results from the questionnaire surveys. During the lesson, we found that students seemed to be afraid of reading aloud new words. Student A said that "I am too shy to read new words aloud because I have difficulty in pronunciation." Eleven others mentioned that they had the same problem. Students

expressed that they found difficulty in pronunciation was due to the difference between the English spelling and pronunciation as well as Vietnamese and English sounds are not the same. Students B and F stated that "Not like Vietnamese, English words have a lot of consonants at the end that need to be pronounced". Students K added "Even in English, some of the same words have different pronunciation if their forms of words change." Student D said "English words cannot be spelled as Vietnamese so whenever I see a new one, I mostly cannot pronounce it correctly." Student N added "Some words I remember their meaning but I can not write down correctly, maybe this is due to the difference between written and spoken forms." In the research carried out by Masfa Maiza [10], it was revealed that the factors affecting the students' pronunciation are interference, phonological system and motivation. When being asked about the number of new words in each lesson, seven of them agreed that there were too many words so they could not remember all. Student Q stated that "Some units we listed more than thirty new words." Student F added more: "Then when we were not able to remember them, we continued meeting another thirties, day by day the new words increased and we felt tired of learning them." Another student G disagreed: "Maybe, because you did not learn new words by heart in the previous lessons, so many words were new to you. I myself did not think this problem was the factor causing difficulty." The student P smiled and added: "But I think lack of knowledge about the topic in Vietnamese is a factor that leads to difficulty in learning new words." Student C agreed "Yes, I think so. Some topics are so strange to us. We even do not know them clearly in Vietnamese." Among a lot of factors, difficulty in concentrating when learning is one factor that was mentioned by some interviewees. Student J said: "Today we were interrupted by many things such as messengers from friends, even games we were playing or interesting stories online so that we sometimes lost concentration during the lesson." Student H added "I agree with her (Student J), social media makes me distracted. When learning vocabulary I am always thinking about interesting things outside the class." When asking about how practice affects their learning vocabulary. Student K and I said that: "In fact, teachers give us time to practice vocabulary so this was not a big problem." "However, it was also a problem in a big size class like mine. You know, there were over fifty five students in my class. Of course, the teacher cannot help all of us practice new words." Practice during lessons is limited; Therefore, the teachers often suggested their students do practice more at home. However, they blamed that they lack time for using new words. In the interview, student M said: "I do not spend enough time to use new words because I am not willing to practice them outside the class in real as well as virtual situations." Like the questionnaire result, the number of students considered "no strategies for learning new words" as the main factor causing difficulty in learning vocabulary was the highest. Student I stated "I think having no strategies is my biggest problem in learning new words. I do not know how to remember new words for a long time. I seem to forget everything after learning for a week." "I do, too." added student G. He also said "Although I write new words until I remember them, after some later lessons I still forget almost everything. I think I do not have the right method of learning new words." Not like some students stated about the lack of grammatical words as the factor causing their difficulties in learning vocabulary in questionnaire surveys, no students who were interviewed considered this factor.

4. Conclusion

Based on the data collected from questionnaire surveys, observations and semi-structured interviews, the study arrived at the following conclusion. The results show that the difficulties faced by the students at Namdinh University of Nursing in learning English vocabulary were various. These problems mainly focused on pronouncing, writing and spelling new words correctly, choosing the appropriate word meanings and memorising new words for a long time. In addition, students also gave some factors that caused their difficulties in learning vocabulary. These factors not only come from the objective reasons but also from the subjective ones. The

factor which plenty of students mentioned is that they do not have strategies for learning English vocabulary effectively. Among the factors given by the researchers, the lack of practice during the lesson was the least frequently reported by the students. Apart from these, the differences between written and spoken forms in English, as well as the differences in English and Vietnamese pronunciation, were factors causing difficulties in learning English vocabulary. Other factors included an excessive number of new words in a lesson, limited time for using new words, lack of knowledge of the equivalent topic in English, and difficulties in concentrating. The writers hope that these findings will help teachers as well as students find the suitable strategies in teaching and learning English vocabulary more effectively.

REFERENCES

- [1] W. D. Yang and W. P. Dai, "Vocabulary Memorizing Strategies by Chinese University Students," *International Education Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 208-214, 2012.
- [2] Q. Pan and R. Xu, "Vocabulary teaching in English language teaching," *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 1, no. 11, pp. 1586-1589, 2011.
- [3] D. R. Anjarani and E. N. S. S. Yuliarsih, "The Students' Difficulties in Enriching Vocabulary and Its Techniques to Overcome the Difficulties," *Sell Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 91-101, 2022.
- [4] D. A. Wilkins, *Linguistics in language teaching*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972.
- [5] N. Afzal, "A Study on Vocabulary-Learning Problems Encountered by BA English Majors at the University Level of Education," *Arab World English Journal*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 81-98, 2019.
- [6] H. Susanto, "A Study on Students' Difficulties In Learning Vocabulary," *Journey Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 46-50, October 2021
- [7] S. Abuhabil, S. Alramly, F. Aljorosh, and A. Ljouely, "The common difficulties of learning English vocabulary and strategies faced second language EFL students some Misurata Secondary schools'," *Scientific Journal of Faculty of Education, Misurata University-Libya*, vol. 1, no. 17, pp. 277-299, March 2021.
- [8] A. S. Rosyada and T. W. Apoko, "Investigating English Vocabulary Difficulties and Its Learning Strategies of Lower Secondary School Students," *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 489-501, July 2023.
- [9] T. D. L. Dao, "Influential factors to sixth graders' english vocabulary memorization skills," *Journal of Foreign Studies*, vol. 33, no. 5, pp. 66-76, 2017.
- [10] M. Masfa, "An Analysis of Students' Pronunciation Errors," *Journal of English Education and Literature*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 18-23, 2020.