

**EXPLORING SEMANTIC COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL INSTRUCTION**

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Semantics in enhancing English language learning among students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The research aims to examine how semantic knowledge contributes to learners' vocabulary development, comprehension, and overall communicative competence. A qualitative research design was employed, involving undergraduate students as participants. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences and instructional practices. The findings reveal that the integration of semantic-based instruction significantly improves students' ability to understand word meanings, interpret contextual language, and use vocabulary accurately in communication. Students exposed to semantic strategies, such as semantic mapping and contextual analysis, demonstrated better comprehension and retention compared to those who relied on traditional grammar-focused approaches. Additionally, the study found that semantic awareness helps learners interpret figurative language, including idioms and metaphors, more effectively. The results suggest that semantics plays a crucial role in developing not only linguistic competence but also communicative competence in English language learning. Therefore, it is recommended that educators incorporate semantic approaches into language teaching to facilitate meaningful learning and improve students' proficiency. Future research is encouraged to explore the application of semantic instruction across different proficiency levels and educational settings.

Keywords: Semantics, English Language Learning, EFL, Vocabulary Development, Communicative Competence

A. INTRODUCTION

Language is fundamentally a system of meaning, and understanding how meaning is constructed and interpreted is essential in language learning. Within the field of semantics, meaning plays a central role in enabling learners to comprehend

and produce language effectively. In English language learning, semantics helps learners interpret words, phrases, and sentences beyond their literal definitions, allowing them to communicate more accurately in various contexts.

Recent studies have emphasized that vocabulary knowledge and meaning-making are critical components of language proficiency. Vocabulary mastery is strongly linked to overall English competence, as learners with limited vocabulary often struggle to develop their language skills effectively (Pratama & Widodo, 2021). Similarly, a systematic review by Zeng et al. (2025) highlights that vocabulary instruction is fundamental to literacy development and effective communication, particularly for English learners.

Moreover, semantic awareness has been identified as a key factor in improving language comprehension. Learners with stronger semantic awareness demonstrate better sentence comprehension across proficiency levels (Chen & Zhang, 2022). In Indonesian EFL contexts, semantic learning techniques have been shown to improve students' understanding of contextual meaning and increase their confidence in communication (Sari & Putra, 2023).

Furthermore, language awareness, including semantic understanding, significantly influences learners' cognitive engagement and overall language development (Rahmawati & Lestari, 2024). Despite these findings, many classrooms still prioritize grammar over meaning, limiting learners' communicative ability. Therefore, integrating semantic approaches into English language teaching is essential.

This study aims to explore the role of semantics in English language learning and examine how semantic knowledge enhances learners' vocabulary development, comprehension, and communicative competence.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of meaning has long been central in semantics, which studies how language conveys meaning. According to Leech (1981), meaning can be classified into conceptual, connotative, social, and affective types, showing its complexity in communication.

In language teaching, semantic competence is closely related to vocabulary mastery. Wilkins (1972) emphasizes that without vocabulary, communication cannot occur. This highlights the importance of meaning in language use. Supporting this, Schmitt (2020) states that vocabulary learning is more effective when words are connected through semantic relationships such as synonymy and antonymy.

Krashen (1985), through the Input Hypothesis, argues that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to meaningful input slightly above their level. This reinforces the importance of semantic comprehension in learning. Similarly, Yule (2010) explains that meaning is influenced not only by linguistic forms but also by context, emphasizing the relationship between semantics and pragmatics.

Recent studies further strengthen this perspective. Nation (2021) highlights the importance of balancing meaning-focused input and output in language learning. Research also shows that semantic mapping improves reading comprehension and vocabulary retention (Smith, 2022). Additionally, digital tools that incorporate semantic features enhance learners' contextual understanding (Lee, 2023). Teaching figurative language through semantic approaches has also been shown to improve learners' interpretive skills (Brown, 2024).

Overall, these studies confirm that semantics plays a vital role in vocabulary development, comprehension, and communicative competence. However, semantic instruction remains underemphasized in many classrooms.

C. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of semantics in English language learning. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences and perceptions.

The participants consist of undergraduate students in an English education program selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis.

To ensure validity, triangulation was applied by comparing multiple data sources. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related

to semantic understanding, vocabulary development, and communication skills. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were also maintained.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that semantic-based instruction significantly enhances students' English proficiency. Students exposed to semantic strategies demonstrated better vocabulary understanding and contextual interpretation.

Classroom observations showed that semantic mapping and contextual learning improved engagement and retention. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the importance of meaning-focused learning (Nation, 2021; Schmitt, 2020).

Interviews indicated that students initially struggled with ambiguity and figurative language but showed improvement after semantic instruction. This supports findings by Brown (2024), which highlight the effectiveness of semantic approaches in teaching figurative language.

Document analysis further revealed that materials incorporating semantic elements were more effective than grammar-focused materials. Students performed better in reading and writing tasks, consistent with findings by Smith (2022) and Lee (2023).

Overall, semantic competence contributed significantly to learners' communicative ability, reducing misunderstandings and improving clarity in communication.

E. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that semantics plays a crucial role in English language learning by enhancing vocabulary mastery, comprehension, and communicative competence. The findings confirm that meaning-focused instruction improves learners' ability to interpret and use language effectively.

Language learning should not focus solely on grammar but also emphasize meaning. Integrating semantic strategies such as contextual learning and semantic mapping can significantly improve learners' proficiency.

Therefore, educators are encouraged to incorporate semantic approaches into their teaching practices. Future research should explore the application of semantic instruction across different contexts and proficiency levels.

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