

## UNLOCKING VOCABULARY MASTERY: POCKETBOOK TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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### ABSTRACTS

The return of English as a subject in elementary school demands help to minimize the students' vocabulary gap. Therefore, this study aims to see the students' and teachers' needs for attractive English learning media which can help them enhance vocabulary mastery. Developing an English pocketbook becomes a solution. Then, as a part of developmental research, a need analysis study was initially conducted. Applying quantitative design, questionnaires and vocabulary tests were distributed to the respondents. Respondents for this needs analysis process were students and teachers at SD Negeri 1 Talang Kelapa. There were 23 respondents, consisting of 1 English teacher, 9 male students, and 13 female students. The questionnaires in Likert scale format were used to check the respondents' perception, motivation, and anxiety toward English subjects at their school. Then, vocabulary tests were given to see students' vocabulary mastery, both in context and literal meaning. The obtained data from questionnaires and vocabulary tests were then analyzed by using descriptive analysis. Finally, it was found that the students and teachers need a pocketbook that is customized based on their needs. The pocketbook developed needs to address the students' low achieved vocabulary topics and the students' anxiety.

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### INTRODUCTION

The subject of English at the elementary school level has remained inactive for several academic years, starting from the enactment of the 2013 Curriculum (Ardaya et al., 2022; Kaltsum, 2016; Maili, 2018). This condition consequently affects the students' competencies in literacies. As (Programme for International Student Assessment, 2019) reported that

Indonesian students were on low level of PISA test, with Level 1 from 4 levels available. Furthermore, a survey also reported that there are only 11% of respondents love reading, 44% of respondents do sports, 32% of respondents like to watch TV, 25% of them listen to music, and 17% use internet (Wolipop, 2016). Seeing the percentage reported, “reading” was actually classified as a non-popular activity to do. This condition leads to a more miserable condition, that Indonesians’ reading motivation stays in position 60 out of 61 countries assessed in a World’s Most Literate Nations Ranked done by Central Connecticut State University (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia, 2017). The phenomena undoubtedly describe the Indonesian students’ ability in English which might be insufficient to help them read books or other media available globally. Unfortunately, not only as the medium for books, English also takes a pivotal role in oral communication. Therefore, more studies emphasize the importance of mastering English from an early age, with the hope that this foreign language proficiency will help individuals compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which requires active communication to be well-established (Munadzdofah, 2017; Nurdini, 2023; Subekti, 2017).

To address this issue while also improving the students’ literacy skills, the Indonesian government has offered the Merdeka Curriculum. As the most recent guide for schools and teachers, this curriculum has been implemented gradually in schools since 2021. It changes the role of English as a subject at school. English has returned as a classroom lesson for elementary school students, even though not yet become the core one. So, all schools have started hiring English teachers to help students require all skills stated in curriculum target phases. In the Merdeka Curriculum, English for the elementary level is designed to achieve indicative skills and competencies in Phase A till Phase D. There are three target elements, including listening – speaking, reading – viewing, writing – presenting, and vocabulary mastery, grammar, and pronunciation becomes the main focus for each of them (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021). However, prioritizing vocabulary mastery is what most of schools can generally do now, especially for those who have just implemented the Merdeka Curriculum this year. They need to fill the vocabulary gap prior to other elements. As it is suggested by some studies that an individual’s vocabulary mastery will influence the communication fluency, both oral and written (Aziz, 2011; Daulay, 2020; Susanto, 2017). Vocabulary is a fundamental component and most important for speakers of a language. It is impossible for an individual to have an effective communication when limited vocabularies possessed to describe the intended message (Dewi, 2017). Moreover, vocabulary mastery at the elementary school level has a significant impact on the development of students’ language competencies. Therefore, there is a lot of study being carried out to help improve vocabulary for pupils at the elementary school level. Strategies have focused on various media, such as hand puppets, picture letter cards, anagram games, picture word cards, and scramble learning models (Arios, 2021; Nurjannah, 2016; Riswiarti, 2021; Sari et al., 2021; Widiyanto et al., 2018).

Supporting vocabulary acquisition, pocketbooks are one of the print learning media that can be a creative idea and can be developed. Its compact form, where the size of the book is small and can be put in the pocket, is an added value for users. Students can check and read the pocketbook whenever needed. Its function which is similar to a catalog provides its own visualization for students so that they are always motivated to read pocketbooks (Trianasari et al., 2024). These portable learning resources offer a unique combination of practicality, accessibility, and directed learning, making them ideal as a supplement to traditional learning materials and a boost to self-study habits. In detail, vocabulary pocketbooks generally refer to small, portable books designed to help people learn and improve their vocabulary. The pocketbook, with its compact format and focused content, has stolen the spotlight as a potential learning tool in education. They offer a myriad of benefits and implications that are

worth exploring, both for students and educators. One of the main benefits of pocketbooks is the increased accessibility and affordability of information (Machuve et al., 2014). Compared to thick and expensive textbooks, pocketbooks are relatively cheaper and easy to distribute, especially in resource-constrained areas. This opens up opportunities for more students to access high-quality learning materials, unhindered by financial or geographical constraints. Therefore, it is highly demanded to see the teachers' and students' needs of the English pocketbook. These three important questions: (1) do students and teachers of elementary school need an English vocabulary pocketbook to enhance their vocabulary size?; (2) what vocabularies do they need?; and (3) how should the vocabulary pocketbook be designed? should firstly be answered before conducting the pocketbook development.

It is not hard to find studies related to pocketbook development. However, there are three notable previous studies that (the researchers think) are relevant to current pocketbook development in terms of methodology, target vocabularies, and language used. First, Karim (2018) developed a pocketbook to improve the vocabulary mastery of his targeted audience, who were undergraduate students. In his findings, he claimed that the pocketbook design has good quality and helps the audiences a lot. It is recommended to be used based on experts' opinions. Second, Nilawati et al. (2021) did a study related to developing a pocketbook for Caddies. In detail, this study created a Japanese pocketbook for tourism. The result of this study hopefully helps improve caddies' competencies in communication and result in a better tourism environment in Bali. Last, Ilma et al. (2022) developed a pocketbook for Indonesian foreign language learners. The book was designed based on the specific needs of the students. Not only that, the book was also validated by experts and was assessed with a final score of 72.5%. With that number, the manuscript of the pocketbook was ready to be used and even published. Although all three studies above relate to pocketbooks, they have different target audiences and topic areas. They all discussed adult foreign language learners, including university students and workers. Looking at how popular the vocabulary pocketbooks are, it can be concluded that pocketbooks are the right choice to be developed. In addition, seeing the lack of pocketbook development in English with the target of elementary school students, this study is expected to fill this research gap. So, this research novelty lies in creating an English vocabulary pocketbook with complete consideration of elementary school teachers' and students' needs to meet the target phases in the Merdeka Curriculum. In short, the whole research activity is to develop an English vocabulary pocketbook. However, this manuscript only discusses one stage of the research done, which is finding the needs of students and teachers at elementary schools. This unique study contributes to the advancement of teaching media for elementary school students, emphasizes the use of printed material which is gradually left behind, and offers users' (students, teachers, researchers) feedback in the field.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study was actually a small part of an R&D project of a research team from Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Sriwijaya. The first stage of the research was a need analysis to see the students' and teachers' opinions about English vocabulary pocketbooks to enhance their vocabulary size. Later, the findings would be prominent feedback to design the pocketbook.

### Research Design

To see and analyze the needs of teachers and students in English vocabulary pocketbooks, survey research was done by applying a quantitative design. It aims at understanding social phenomena related to the gap in vocabulary in elementary school, the media needs to solve the gap, and what materials to focus. To define, survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample

or to the entire population of people in order to describe attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population (Creswell, 2005). To run the procedures, survey researchers collect quantitative data using questionnaires or interviews and statistically analyze the data to describe the trends in the responses given. This method also provides the ability to measure the specific needs of vocabulary learning, such as the most difficult vocabulary. In addition, the quantitative approach offers more objective, comparable, and scalable data, making it suitable for addressing students' and teachers' needs.

### Subject

This study was conducted at Sekolah Dasar Negeri 1 Talang Kelapa, Banyuasin, specifically the fifth-grade students. They were purposively selected to be subjects due to some characteristics possessed. First, they have experienced both curriculums, the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum. Second, they have experienced no English class during their early level of learning (first, second, third, and fourth class). Third, they are the target of the Minimum Competency Assessment known as AKM. The results of tests will have a significant influence on the national Minimum Competency Assessment. Those characteristics are commonly possessed by students who experienced the curriculum shift so the data collected might answer the addressed global vocabulary gap problem. In detail, the subjects who met the specific characters in this research were 22 students, consisting of 9 males and 13 females. Meanwhile, only one English teacher, an S.Pd. holder (equivalent to a Bachelor of Education) with 3 years of experience, participated in the research. Prior to participation, informed consent was introduced to all participants so that they were all assured of the data confidentiality.

### Instruments

Questionnaires in 5-scale answers and vocabulary tests were used as the instruments. The questionnaires used in this study adapted the design from other studies, namely Ilma et al., 2022; Kholid et al., 2023; and Sanusi et al., 2024. The aims were used to check the students' and teachers' preferences toward the English Vocabulary Pocketbook. The domain measured in questionnaire items is divided into 2 parts. The first was designed to know the students' and teachers' perspectives toward English subjects. The next part is to assess the motivation in English learning. The last is to see the student's anxiety. Table 1 describes the questionnaire components in detail.

Table 1  
The Summary of Questionnaire Components

No	Domains Measured	Number of Items	Scales
1	Perspective	5	5-point Likert Scale
2	Motivation	5	5-point Likert Scale
3	Anxiety	5	5-point Likert Scale

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, three experts evaluated the items for content validity, and modifications were made based on their suggestions. Following the validity results, an analysis using Cronbach's alpha for each section showcased high internal consistency, with a reliability coefficient of 0.95 for Part 1, 0.86 for Part 2, and 0.72 for Part 3.

In addition, to see the focus of vocabulary needed by the students, the distribution of vocabulary tests was conducted for students. The vocabulary tests were designed to see topics which needed to be highlighted as the pocketbook framework. The format of the test is closed-ended questions, mainly in multiple-choice form. Before distributing the test to the respondents, the items were piloted with 15 fifth graders from a neighborhood elementary

school, who participated as test takers. Since the vocabulary test items were taken from the English for Nusantara book and the list of CEFR-level AI words, content validity assessment was not necessary as the test items were derived from published sources with a clear blueprint. However, the test-retest reliability was still conducted to ensure consistency. The test was administered twice and resulted in the  $r$  value of 0.97. This score suggested that students who scored very high in the first administration of the test also scored very high in the second administration, while those who scored very low in the first administration also scored very low in the second. Therefore, the test demonstrated high reliability.

### **Data Analysis**

The primary goal of this study was to summarize and describe the vocabulary needs of both students and teachers for the development of a vocabulary pocketbook. Therefore, descriptive statistical analysis was sufficient to address the focus of the study, which involved describing the performance of students on the vocabulary test and identifying patterns or trends in their responses. Consequently, data from the questionnaires were analyzed descriptively using statistical tools in Microsoft Excel. Meanwhile, the vocabulary test data were coded and ranked according to the topics provided. From the statistical analysis results, the researchers can then draw conclusion about the students' and teachers' current condition of English teaching, potential problems, and future needs of English learning media. From the test given, the researchers can draw a conclusion about what topics of English lessons for the fifth graders need to be dominantly addressed in the pocketbook design. Furthermore, the test results also helped researchers design the framework of the pocketbook.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Findings**

To have detailed information, the research findings will be discussed in three parts questionnaires, interviews, and vocabulary tests.

### **Questionnaire Results**

Talking about the students' and teachers' perspectives on English subjects, the responses were varied. From the questionnaire distributed, it was found that students have different views about the importance of English for their daily activities. 5% of subjects assumed English was not strongly important and 36% of subjects agreed English was not important to them. 14% of subjects claimed they felt neutral about the importance of English. The rest of them 36% think English is important and 9% think English is strongly important. With the perspectives above, most of the respondents or 36% feel that English is hard to learn and acquire. Meanwhile, 23% and 9% of subjects feel learning English is quite easy thing to do. The rest of them (32%) feel learning English is neither hard nor easy. Though in some aspects the students assumed English is not significantly important for them and hard to learn, there is no one or 0% of them said learning English is not interesting. 77% of the respondents agreed English is interesting and worth to learn. Therefore, 82% of subjects believe that knowing and being able to use English can help them in the future, not only for the academic, but also the global citizen matters. However, there are still 14% of respondents feel English will not have an impact on their future, yet 5% of them have no idea about the advantages of English in their future careers and academics. Then, discussing English and communicative abilities, most of the respondents (45%) think that mastering English will enhance communication skills, yet 41% of respondents believe that English mastery might not have any influence on someone's communication skills. All data above are displayed in Table 2.



Table 2  
Respondents' Perspectives of English

No	Items	%				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	English is important	5	36	14	36	9
2.	English is easy to learn	0	36	32	23	9
3.	English is an interesting subject	0	18	5	45	32
4.	English will have a positive contribution to someone's future	0	14	5	41	41
5	English enhances someone's communicative skills	5	36	14	27	18

Having those perspectives above, the potential problem in English learning mainly comes from respondents' motivation and anxiety of learning. From the questionnaire distributed, the low motivation of respondents is figured out as the main problem which leads the respondents to the negligence of English learning. As it is displayed in Figure 1, it can be seen that 64% of respondents feel less motivated to learn English, 23% of respondents are in a neutral position, and only 14% of respondents seem motivated in learning.

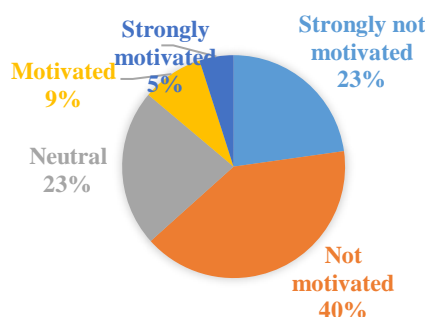


Figure 1. Respondents' Motivation in Learning English

These less motivated conditions are caused by respondents' anxiety. For instance, most of the respondents (73%) felt worried about making mistakes when they used English. Furthermore, 41% of respondents got nervous about speaking English in front of the class or in public.

### Vocabulary Test Results

The subjects also talked about limited vocabulary size. They claimed due to a lack of vocabulary, they felt nervous to use English. To prove this point, the respondents then were given vocabulary tests. The findings from the test show respondents faced difficulties in certain topics, yet they can show better in certain topics. The tests raised popular or common vocabularies related to fourteen topics, including greetings, introduction, schools, houses, months, numbers, animals, vegetables, fruits, colors, hobbies, seasons/weather, transportation, and health problems. It was found that the respondents faced difficulties for 8 topics out of 14 topics. Only a small number of respondents can answer the test from those eight topics correctly, including Introduction, My School, My House, Numbers, Animals, Hobby, Seasons, and Health Problems. None of the topics can be answered more than 50% correctly by the respondents. Only 46.4% of the respondents can answer the test of Introduction topic correctly. Then, 22.7% of respondents can answer School topics correctly. For topic related to House, there are only 16.4% of the respondents can do the test well.

Furthermore, Number and Animal topics resulted in quite good numbers of participants, which are 45.5% and 32.7%. There are only 19.1% of respondents can answer the test related to the Hobby topic. The rest are the two most difficult topics in the vocabulary tests because there are only 8.2% of respondents and 3.6% of respondents can complete the test successfully. The data are displayed in Table 3.

The Table 3 below, it is seen that health problem is the lowest achievement of respondents. It can be inferred that the health problems vocabulary lists are the most difficult for the respondents. Followed by words related to the Seasons topic, in which there was only 8.2% of the respondents performed well, yet 91.8% of them failed. Vocabulary related to the Introduction topic might be the most common word lists for the students because 46.4% of them can answer the tests correctly.

Table 3  
Difficult Topics in Vocabulary Test

No	Topics	Successful Respondents (%)	Failed Respondents (%)
1.	Introduction	46.4	53.6
2.	Schools	22.7	77.3
3.	Houses	16.4	83.6
4.	Numbers	45.5	54.5
5.	Animals	32.7	67.3
6.	Hobby	19.1	80.9
7.	Seasons	8.2	91.8
8.	Health Problems	3.6	96.4

Meanwhile, for topics of Greetings, Months, Vegetables, Fruits, Colors, and Transportation, the respondents can perform pretty well. More than 50% of the respondents can answer the tests correctly. 'Colors' might be the most mastered topic for the respondents. There are 88.2% of the respondents who can correctly find the answers. Followed by the 'Fruits' topic, 87.3% of the respondents could answer the test correctly. Moreover, 'Month', 'Greetings', 'Vegetables', and 'Transportations' were the other successfully answered topics obtained. In numbers, they were displayed as 80.9%, 60.9%, 56.4%, and 56.4% of the respondents who can complete the tests correctly. Seeing the percentage of correct numbers, it can be concluded that the respondents have those vocabularies stored in their memory and they can recall the vocabularies easily. To have further information, Table 4 shows the data in detail.

Table 4  
Successfully Answered Topics in Vocabulary Test

No	Topics	Successful Respondents (%)	Failed Respondents (%)
1.	Greetings	60.9	39.1
2.	Month	80.9	19.1
3.	Vegetables	56.4	43.6
4.	Fruits	87.3	12.7
5.	Colors	88.2	11.8
6.	Transportation	56.4	43.6

To conclude the data in Table 4, words related to months, fruits, and colors are classified as the most common vocabulary by the respondents. This condition might be caused by the identical words used in both Bahasa Indonesia and the English Language. For example, for months, Bahasa Indonesia has *Januari*, *Februari*, *Maret*, *April*, and so on, yet

English has January, February, March, April, etc. They seem to be the same phones, yet a bit different in the graph. Therefore, it is not hard for the respondents to use them daily.

### Vocabulary in Context Test Results

Not only the ability to translate the word from a foreign language, the study also tested the respondents' understanding of using the words contextually. The average score obtained from the test was 30. This obtained score was, of course, an urgent sign to treat. It showed that most of the respondents indeed need help from teachers to enhance their vocabulary mastery. From ten multiple questions given, there are only two respondents (9.1%) who achieved more than fifty percent correct answers. One respondent got 70 and one respondent got 60. Meanwhile, the other respondents obtained varied scores from 10 to 50. Unluckily, 30 is the most frequent score obtained by respondents or mode. Further information about vocabulary in context test results can be seen in Figure 2.

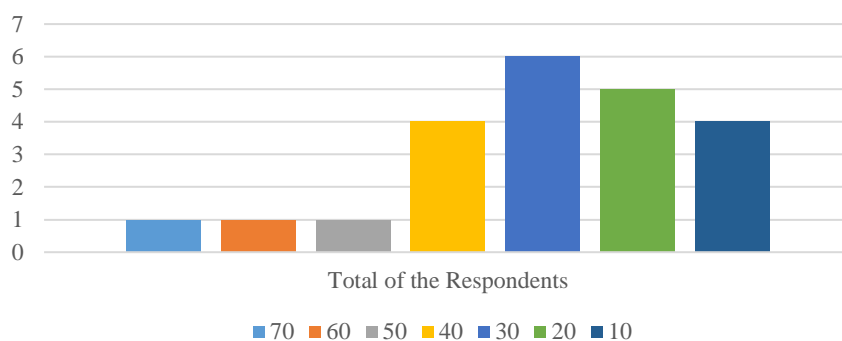


Figure 2. Score Distribution

The data, then, calculated for mean, median, and mode to help the researcher gain more analysis. Table 5 provides the descriptive statistical data.

Table 5  
Vocabulary in Context Test Results

Mean	Median	Mode
30	30	30

This low obtained data urged the research team to contribute for a better English environment at SDN 1 Talang Kelapa.

### Discussion

This study tries to answer three research questions based on the findings. First, it is obviously understood that students and teachers of SDN 1 Talang Kelapa need English learning media in their classrooms. The need for new and updated media was due to lower scores and successful rates obtained by students, both in literal translation and contextual translation. The scores obtained mostly ranged from 10 to 40 and the success rate was below 50%. According to some studies, visual media can significantly help students improve their vocabulary mastery and size (Snae, 2023; Wijayanti, 2018; Zidni et al., 2023). Therefore, the a visually-attractive design of the pocketbook can be the good news for the students and teachers at SDN 1 Talang Kelapa. Moreover, there were various studies related to the use of vocabulary pocketbooks that have already been implemented for quite a long time. For example, shared book reading and gameplay were used to build vocabulary knowledge in preschoolers (Hassinger-Das et al., 2016). The result showed improved knowledge of the research participants. There was also a big book. A study designed the teaching process for



vocabulary improvement of early learners by using a big book. As a result, the learners involved in the learning process vigorously were active in question-and-answer activities, and were paying their best attention to the learning process due to the media used. Lastly, the study also claimed that big books offered positive interaction between teachers and learners throughout classroom activities (Santi et al., 2016). Not only big books and picture books are also used as learning media to improve the student's writing skills. For that, the picture book is found a great influencer for learners' creativity in writing. Consequently, books and pictures are the two elements that can help students learn and memorize the word easily. Therefore, it would not be surprising if there were hundreds of picture vocabulary books available in stores. However, these books for sale might not answer the needs of the students and teachers of SDN 1 Talang Kelapa. For that reason, the research team can conclude that they need their customized vocabulary pocketbook which addresses their own needs. It is hoped the later design of vocabulary pocketbooks can enhance their vocabulary sizes. As some studies found that literacy is closely related to vocabulary mastery, enhancing the vocabulary sizes would automatically support the development of students' literacy (Capin et al., 2023).

Knowing about vocabulary leveling by the Common European Framework of Reference, that is A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2, this study can assume that the students need level A1 vocabulary lists to study. The data obtained showed that respondents faced difficulties on certain topics, including introduction, schools, houses, numbers, animals, hobbies, seasons, and health problems. 'Introduction' is related to words used by someone when she or he wants to introduce herself or himself to others. Some words might be full name, address, school, age, etc. Then, 'schools and houses' bring the same concept of vocabulary to expose. These two topics introduce words that talk about rooms or things. For example, dining room, bedroom, kitchen, blackboard, chair, table, globe, and so on will be the most popular vocabulary for the topics. Meanwhile, 'numbers, animals, hobbies, seasons, and health problems' will also offer specific words related to each topic, such as one hundred, peacock, autumn, and sore throat. Though the test result showed students can do better in some topics, for instance, greetings, month, vegetables, colors, etc., it does not mean that those topics are excluded in the design of vocabulary pocketbook. They will still be included, yet in different quantities. Following the findings above, the pocketbook would have the failed topics as the major focus so that it really meets the students' needs. Like several other studies, they really focus on the words needed by students (Laubscher & Light, 2020). Furthermore, a vocabulary pocketbook is the most appropriate strategy to address lexical challenges when students acquire the vocabulary and store it in their memory (Bayat et al., 2025).

Last, talking about the pocketbook design, it is important to address the results of the questionnaire given to the respondents. A pocketbook that can help change the students' perspective toward English lessons might be very useful for teachers. The data obtained provided a conclusion of less motivated students and majorly anxious students. Therefore, the pocketbook design must answer the needs. To boost their motivation, researchers believe attractive colorful pictures or illustrations can help. In addition, some studies support this idea. Exciting pictures or illustrations amuse and engage students to joy so that increasing their interest, motivating them to learn, and lessen the anxiety can obviously be done by the teacher with proper classroom treatments (Hobbs, 2022; Ndlovu, 2024; Oktarina et al., 2020). However, the pocketbook will not include exercises, worksheets, or tests in the content so that students will not have extra pressure when using the book in classroom. Hopefully, with this kind of design, the pocketbook will be a good resource to use for those 73% of respondents who felt worried about making mistakes while learning English. Moreover, unlike other pocketbooks, the teacher suggested having units that address useful word lists in

the Merdeka Curriculum accordingly. Furthermore, to have it internationally function, the researcher team decided to also include CEFR Level A1 word lists (Cambridge Assessment English, 2018). Each unit of pocketbook should focus on distinct areas of vocabulary in each unit, namely greetings, introductions, schools, houses, months, numbers, animals, vegetables, colors, hobbies, seasons, transportations, and health problems.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical need for a customized vocabulary pocketbook to support English language learning at SDN 1 Talang Kelapa, addressing both motivational and comprehension barriers due to English learning loss. It was known that during the 2013 Curriculum, English was not taught as a lesson for elementary school students. However, starting in 2022, English was reintroduced in classroom learning through the Merdeka Curriculum. The students' low performance in vocabulary, particularly in contextual usage, points to a demand for an engaging learning resource tailored to their specific needs. Therefore, by targeting core vocabulary topics such as greetings, introductions, schools and home items, seasons, and health issues-the pocketbook is designed to directly address gaps in students' vocabulary problems. Furthermore, the inclusion of attractive illustrations is also needed to increase engagement and support a positive perception of English learning. Importantly, the pocketbook is free from traditional tests or drills to prevent added pressure. It is to highlight the student-centered learning process where they feel safe to explore language by themselves.

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