Problem-based learning in Mastering Arabic Vocabulary in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools

Penerapan Problem Based Learning dalam Penguasaan Kosakata Bahasa Arab di Pondok Pesantren Modern

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Abstract
This study examines the role of the problem-based learning model in mastering mufradāt among 3 KMI at Islamic boarding schools. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and language instructors, and a review of relevant documents. The results indicate that the implementation of PBL strengthened mastery of mufradāt through several indicators: an accurate understanding of word meanings, increased vocabulary use in oral responses, and a more consistent ability to construct sentences appropriate to the context. Changes in learning behaviour were also evident, such as more active participation, the ability to solve problems independently and in groups, and increased Confidence in speaking Arabic. The problem identification stage and the collaborative inquiry process were the most influential aspects. The context of language familiarisation, such as muhādarah and taʿbīr syafawī, enhanced the natural internalization of new words, forming a strong synergy with PBL. This research offers novelty by demonstrating the readiness of PBL to be integrated into the immersive learning culture of modern Islamic boarding schools, thereby making it an effective model for contextual mufradāt learning.

Keywords: Modern Islamic Boarding Schools, Mufradāt, Problem Based Learning, Qualitative Study

ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في دور نموذج التعلم القائم على حل المشكلات في إكساب المفردات لدى الطالبات الصف الثالث في معهد الحديث باستخدام منهج الكيفي، جمع البيانات من خلال ملاحظة، مقابلة مع معلمة وهيئة إشراف اللغة ومراجعة للوثائق ذات الصلة. تشير النتائج إلى أن تطبيق نموذج التعلم القائم على حل المشطلات عزز إتقان المفردات من خلال عدة مؤشرات: الفهم الدقيق لمعاني الكلمات، وزيادة

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استخدام المفردات في الاستجابة الشفهية، وزيادة القدرة على بناء جمل مناسب للسياق. كما كانت التغييرات في سلوك التعلم واضحة، مثل زيادة مشاركة النشطة، القدرة على حل المشكلات بشكل المشكلات بشكل مستقل وفي مجموعات، وزيادة الثقة في التحدث باللغة العربية. كانت مرحلة تحديد المشكلة وعملية الاستقصاء التعاوني من أكثر الجوانب تاثيرا، حيث شجعت الطالبات على اكتشاف واستخدام المفردات المتعلقة بمواقف الحياة, ساهم سياق التالف اللغوي مثل المحاضرة والتعبير الشفوي، في اكتساب المفردات بشكل طبيعي. يقدم هذا البحث الجديد بإظهاره جاهزة التعلم القائم على حل المشكلات، ليصبح نموذجا فعالا لتعلم المفردات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم القائم على المشكلات، المفردات، معهدي العصري.

Introduction

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of learning Arabic, as it supports both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills.[1] Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, students struggle to comprehend texts and articulate their ideas effectively.[2] However, in many modern Islamic boarding schools, vocabulary learning remains dominated by memorization, with limited attention to meaning, context, and critical reflection.[3] This condition makes students less active and unable to connect new vocabulary with real communication situations.

To address this issue, the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model offers a relevant alternative. PBL encourages learners to construct meaning through collaborative exploration of real-life problems,[4] Aligning with 21st-century learning demands that emphasize critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration.[5] Empirical studies also demonstrate

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[1] Siti Tsamrotul Fuady dkk., "Efektivitas Penggunaan Media Google Form Dalam Meningkatkan Kemampuan Mufrodat Siswa," *Dirasah : Jurnal Studi Ilmu Dan Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2025): 516–24, https://doi.org/10.58401/dirasah.v8i2.

[2] Fitri Nurhayati dan Irpan Hilmi, "Efektivitas Pembekalan Kosakata Harian Terhadap Kemampuan Berbicara Santri: Penelitian Di Kelas 8 Tsanawiyah Pesantren Persis 67 Benda Kota Tasikmalaya," *JURNAL SYNTAX IMPERATIF : Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan* 5, no. 5 (2024): 1011–26, https://doi.org/10.36418/syntaximperatif.v5i5.523.

[3] Muhammad Munib Fauzi dkk., "STRATEGI MANAJEMEN PEMBELAJARAN KITAB KUNING DALAM MENGHADAPI TANTANGAN DI ERA MODERN (STUDI KASUS DI PONDOK PESANTRENKARAMATUL AULIA LIANG ANGGANG)," *JURNAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT* 13, no. 1 (2025): 274–82, https://doi.org/10.37081/ed.v13i1.6992.

[4] Kamsiah Kamsiah dkk., "Pengaruh Model Contextual Teaching and Learning Terhadap Penguasaan Kosa Kata Dan Kemampuan Menulis Bahasa Inggris Di SMP Negeri 10 Bengkalis," *Jurnal Intelek Insan Cendikia* 1, no. 8 (2024): 4313–23.

[5] Arini Nuora Darina dkk., "Integrasi Kecerdasan Digital Dan Keterampilan Adaptif Abad Ke-21," *PARADIGMA: JURNAL PEMIKIRAN DAN PENELITIAN PENDIDIKAN* 11, no. 2 (2025): 140–51.

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the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing motivation and vocabulary learning outcomes.[6] Masyitoh, Haniefa, and Bahtiar (2025) found that integrating digital literacy with the PBL model significantly increased student engagement and learning outcomes.[7] Similar results were reported by al-Raifi et al. (2024), who demonstrated that the application of PBL in mufradāt learning led to a significant increase in vocabulary comprehension compared to conventional methods.[8] Research by Pramesti et al. Also reinforces these findings, showing that PBL is more effective than traditional lecture methods in improving the vocabulary mastery of secondary school students.[9]

In addition to the PBL model, Lestari's research in the al-mahārah journal shows that the application of a constructivist approach with mind mapping techniques can facilitate a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the meaning and relationships between Arabic vocabulary.[10] Meanwhile, Mawardy (2024) found that the application of visual media-based PBL effectively improved the mastery of mufradāt and speaking skills of students in the Arabic language and literature study programme at UIN Tulungagung.[11]

Subkhi and Tias (2024) emphasize that limitations in technological infrastructure and low digital literacy among teachers are the primary obstacles to implementing digital-based

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[6] Surini Surini, "Peningkatan Hasil Belajar Bahasa Inggris Melalui Model Project-Based Learning: Studi Tindakan Pada Siswa Kelas XI MAN 1 Yogyakarta," *Indonesian Journal of Action Research* 3, no. 2 (2024): 69–77, https://doi.org/10.14421/ijar.2024.32-02.

[7] Siti Masyitoh dkk., "INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL LITERACY AND PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL) MODEL TO IMPROVE ARABIC LEARNING OUTCOMES," *Journal International Seminar on Languages, Literature, Arts, and Education (ISLLAE)* 7, no. 1 (2025): 1, https://doi.org/10.21009/ISLLAE.07103.

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[10] Ni'am Fadina Istiqomah dkk., "Improving Arabic Vocabulary Mastery with a Constructivist Approach through Mind Map: Meningkatkan Penguasaan Kosakata Bahasa Arab Dengan Pendekatan Konstruktivis Melalui Mind Map," *Al Mahāra: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 11, no. 1 (2025): 83–102, https://doi.org/10.14421/almahara.2025.0111-05.

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learning in Islamic educational institutions.[12] Particularly regarding the influence of pesantren characteristics on the implementation and perception of learning.[13]

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine the application of the problem-based learning (PBL) model to vocabulary mastery at the Modern Islamic boarding school Darussalam Gontor 1st campus. This approach was chosen because it allows for a natural understanding of the learning process and dynamics within the context of an Islamic boarding school classroom. The study took place from July to September 2025, involving 60 3 KMI students, an Arabic language teacher, and a language tutor. Subjects were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in PBL-based learning.

Data collection was conducted through repeated observations in the classroom and dormitory environments, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews. Observations focused on vocabulary use practices in daily communication and the implementation of PBL stages during learning. Interviews were conducted with the teacher, language tutor, and ten students to explore experiences, perceptions, and challenges that emerged during the learning process. Documents such as lesson plans, student worksheets, evaluation results, and field notes were used to strengthen the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing/verifying conclusions.[14] This process co-occurred from the beginning of data collection to the final results. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and methods was conducted by comparing the consistency between the results of observations, interviews, and documentation.[15] This approach enhances the validity and credibility of research findings.[16]

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[12] Muhammad Subkhi dan Divara Aulia Haning Tyas, "Enhancing Arabic Vocabulary Mastery through Digital Literacy: Overcoming Challenges and Implementing Effective Strategies," *Language, Technology, and Social Media* 2, no. 1 (2024): 11–24, https://doi.org/10.70211/ltsm.v2i1.38.

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Results

Findings from observations, interviews, and documentation reveal that applying the *problem-based learning* (PBL) model in teaching Arabic vocabulary (*mufradāt*) within a modern Islamic boarding school fosters an organized and active learning process. The Arabic teacher's role shifts from being the primary source of information to a facilitator who guides students in constructing their own understanding of vocabulary meanings through contextual problem-solving activities related to daily life in the dormitory.

1. **Implementation of PBL stages**

    The learning process followed key phases of the PBL approach: problem presentation, exploration, collaborative inquiry, solution discussion, and reflection. Observations conducted on May 20, 27, and June 3, 2025, in Class 3 KMI showed progressive development in classroom dynamics. During the first session, students responded to contextual prompts, such as asking permission to borrow a dictionary in Arabic. Instead of translating words literally, learners generated vocabulary based on situational meaning (استأذن، قرض، معجم، صديق). In the second and third sessions, students began applying broader contextual reasoning and using synonyms such as جلس/قعد and نام/رقد، indicating lexical growth and higher-order thinking.

2. **Teacher's Role**

    The Arabic teacher acted as a facilitator rather than a direct transmitter of information. She guided exploration by posing questions and linking vocabulary to real routines. During the interview (June 5 2025), the teacher noted: "*Students remember vocabulary more easily when they understand its context. For example, during cleaning activities, they grasp the word* نَظَّفَ *because it relates directly to their daily routines.*"

    This shift in instructional role supported autonomy and discovery-based learning.

3. **Student Responses**

    Most students showed increased motivation, Confidence, and willingness to participate. Eight out of ten interviewees expressed that PBL helped them remember vocabulary because they searched, applied, and negotiated the meaning themselves. One student shared: "*When we solve problems, we find the words on our own, and that makes them easier to remember.*"

    Another mentioned: " *Learning feels more natural because the words match our daily life.*"

These responses align with observed improvements in participation and the use of contextual vocabulary.

4. Learning challenges

Despite a positive outcome, several obstacles emerged. Two students reported difficulty in spontaneous speaking due to limited vocabulary recall and anxiety. One commended:

"I understand the meaning, but it is hard to speak fluently in front of others." The limitations during class activities and revision stages.

Table 1. Observed Learning Indicators Across PBL Stages

PBL Stage	Evidence from Observation	Vocabulary Used	Student response
Problem Identification	20-May	قرض، استأذن، معجم	Students attempted contextual guessing
Collaborative Inquiry	27-May	الانضباط في الوقت	Participation increased
Application & Reflection	03-Jun	جلس/قعد، نام/رقد	Synonym production emerged

Further research could examine moderating variables such as the intensity of the Arabic-speaking environment, students' prior abilities, and the frequency of exposure to words in informal settings. For example, a two-group experimental study (PBL vs. Control) in several Islamic boarding schools could measure differences in increases in active vocabulary. In addition, longitudinal studies could monitor whether increases in productive vocabulary use are sustained over the long term.

As a descriptive qualitative study, its strength lies in the depth of context and participant narratives, rather than in large-scale observations. Therefore, the application of the findings must be accompanied by consideration of the local context and replication of the study in other institutions to increase external validity.

Overall, this learning journey reflects a shift from exposure to understanding to contextual practice, and finally to early spontaneous production. Both observations and interviews confirm that implementing PBL stimulates students' motivation, curiosity, and Confidence in using Arabic communicatively. The immersive Arabic-speaking environment—supported by classroom interactions, *muhādarah*, *taʿbīr syafawī*, and daily conversations—creates a language-rich atmosphere that naturally enhances vocabulary

acquisition. Triangulated data indicate that PBL has a positive influence on vocabulary mastery, critical reasoning, and collaboration, although differences in ability and time constraints remain as minor challenges. In summary, PBL proves effective in Arabic language learning within modern Islamic boarding schools, as it integrates the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of language acquisition in a balanced manner.

A more visible pattern of vocabulary development emerges when observing students' progression from understanding to independent use. Initially, learners could only recognize and interpret new words at a passive level. As PBL activities required them to negotiate meaning and discuss language within a real problem context, the vocabulary became more meaningful and personally connected. This was followed by guided practice, where students began constructing short responses using the target vocabulary. By the final meetings, some learners showed early signs of active mastery, such as producing synonyms or applying words spontaneously without prompts.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that vocabulary mastery cannot rely solely on memorization. Students demonstrated better retention and recall when vocabulary was learned through meaningful, contextual activities. When the Problem-Based Learning model (PBL) was applied, learners connected new mufradāt to real-life experiences—such as dormitory cleaning, discipline, and peer communication—making vocabulary more memorable and functional. This pattern aligns with meaningful and situated learning principles,[17] Where knowledge develops through participation in authentic environments.

PBL also supported cognitive engagement while reducing learning fatigue.[18] During discussion, problem-solving, and reflection activities, students negotiated meaning and actively applied vocabulary to enhance their understanding.[19] These processes align with the core assumptions of social constructivism and Second Language Acquisition theory, emphasising that vocabulary develops through interaction and purposeful language use,

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[17] Khoirul Huda dan Djono Djono, "Mengintegrasikan Teori Pembelajaran Bermakna dan Konstruktivisme dalam Pembelajaran Sejarah di Era Digital," *Jurnal Artefak* 12, no. 1 (2025): 137, https://doi.org/10.25157/ja.v12i1.18462.

[18] Roslitha Uli Banjarnahor dkk., "PENERAPAN MODEL PEMBELAJARAN PROBLEM BASED LEARNING TERHADAP PENGUASAAN KOSAKATA (VOCABULARY) PESERTA DIDIK DENGAN MENGGUNAKAN MEDIA PEMBELAJARAN INTERAKTIF PADA MATA PELAJARAN BAHASA INGGRIS KELAS I SD NEGERI 090612 MEDAN TAHUN PEMBELAJARAN 2024/2025," *Pendas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 9, no. 3 (2024): 249–62, https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v9i3.18327.

[19] Isop Syafei, "IMPLIKASI TEORI BELAJAR KONSTRUKSIVISME TERHADAP PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA ARAB," *Al-Fakkaar* 6, no. 2 (2025): 35–58, https://doi.org/10.52166/alf.v6i2.9254.

rather than passive exposure to language.[20] As several students expressed, learning vocabulary through problem situations "makes the words stick longer because we use them, not only memorise them."

This model also promotes the development of self-regulated learning, enabling students to manage learning strategies, interpret meaning, and reflect on their own learning process.[21] In the context of learning in Islamic boarding schools, these findings are confirmed: students become more active in discovering the meaning of vocabulary independently and are more motivated because learning activities are directly related to their real-life experiences.

Other studies have shown that PBL is not only effective in improving academic outcomes but also in developing students' critical thinking and collaboration skills.[22] Although conducted in the context of English language learning, these findings are relevant to the context of this study, as santri also demonstrate thinking, discussion, and contextual vocabulary use during the learning process.

Although the results of this study align with those of various previous studies, there are significant contextual differences. Most PBL studies have been conducted in public schools that use the target language outside of limited classrooms. Meanwhile, in the pesantren context, an intensive linguistic environment—through activities such as muhādarah, taʿbīr syafawī, and daily conversations—creates a language-rich environment that reinforces the effectiveness of pbl and accelerates the process of mufradāt internalization.

These findings also indicate challenges in the spontaneous use of active mufradāt. Two students interviewed admitted to understanding the meaning of words in context but were not yet able to use them fluently in speech. This reflects the difference between students' receptive and productive mastery. In line with previous studies, PBL has been proven to be

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[20] Qian Guo dkk., "Effects of problem-based learning on EFL learning: A systematic review," *PLOS ONE* 19, no. 12 (2024): e0307819, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0307819.

[21] Hisyam Syafii, "A Problem-Based Learning Sebagai Strategi Untuk Mengembangkan Kreativitas Metakognitif Pada Siswa: Perspektif Psikologi Pendidikan," *Jurnal Konatif: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 3, no. 1 (2025): 18–33, https://doi.org/10.62203/jkjip.v3i1.85.

[22] Fatma Zehra Kök dan Burcu Duman, "The Effect of Problem-Based Learning on Problem-Solving Skills in English Language Teaching," *Journal of Pedagogical Research* 7, no. 1 (2023): 154–73, https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.202318642.

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effective in increasing understanding and engagement.[23] However, repeated practice is still needed for language production skills to develop optimally.[24]

Additionally, another challenge lies in allocating time effectively. The process of designing relevant contextual problems and providing intensive assistance to each group means that PBL takes longer to implement than conventional methods. These findings align with O'Brien's (2014) assertion that the weaknesses of PBL lie in the time required and the complexity of lesson planning.[25] Therefore, the implementation of PBL needs to be adjusted to time management and teacher resource capabilities to remain effective.

Table 2. Cognitive and Vocabulary Outcomes PBL Stages

PBL Process	Cognitive Impact	Impact on Arabic Vocabulary
Problem Identification	Activate prior knowledge	Recognise familiar and new words
Inquiry	Negotiation of meaning	New vocabulary is stored in the semantic network
Collaboration	Social scaffolding	Increased fluency and Confidence

The findings of this study have important practical implications for teachers and pesantren administrators. Teachers should design problem-based learning scenarios that are closely related to the lives of santri, such as daily activities in the dormitory, social interactions, or religious conversations, so that the mufradāt used feel authentic and meaningful. In designing these scenarios, teachers need to adjust the level of difficulty to the students' abilities. During the learning process, teachers act as facilitators who provide initial guidance—for example, through prompting questions, example sentences, or synonyms—and gradually reduce their assistance so that students can think and speak independently.

From an institutional perspective, Islamic boarding schools can support the implementation of PBL by creating an environment conducive to practising Arabic outside the classroom, providing regular discussion spaces, and encouraging spontaneous communication in Arabic in various activities. These steps help to expand vocabulary

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[23] Islamiyah Nur Hidayati dkk., "Penerapan Metode Problem Based Learning Dalam Meningkatkan Berfikir Kritis Pada Pembelajaran PAI," *Journal of Instructional and Development Researches* 4, no. 6 (2024): 540–50, https://doi.org/10.53621/jider.v4i6.418.

[24] Abdul Majid dan Misbahul Arifin, "FLIPPED CLASSROOM EFEKTIVITAS MODEL PEMBELEJARAN TERBALIK DALAM MENINGKATKAN PEMAHAMAN SISWA," *JIM : Jurnal Ilmu Multidisiplin* 1, no. 3 (2025): 210–21.

[25] Deby Rakhmawati, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Problem-Based Learning Models," *Social, Humanities, and Educational Studies (SHES): Conference Series* 4, no. 5 (2022): 5, https://doi.org/10.20961/shes.v4i5.66052.

exposure and deepen language mastery through real-life experiences in the students' daily lives.

Theoretically, this study shows that PBL can be integrated with situated learning and embodied cognition theories in language learning. As emphasized by Reggin et al. (2023), language learning does not only occur in an abstract space, but in a social and sensorimotor context: the meaning of words is connected to physical and contextual experiences (situated & embodied cognition). In your research, the use of mufradāt in real activities (e.g., the word رأى و نظر during duty) strengthens the sensorimotor relationship between words and authentic experiences, thereby helping to represent mental meaning. This confirms that word learning occurs not only through verbal instruction but also through contextual experiences.

Therefore, the application of PBL in mufradāt learning in modern Islamic boarding schools demonstrates that this method is capable of integrating cognitive, affective, and social aspects of language in a contextual and meaningful manner. The connection between word usage and real-life experiences strengthens the internalization of vocabulary. Despite challenges such as limited active vocabulary and differences in students' abilities, PBL remains an innovative approach that is worth implementing and researching further in the context of Arabic language education in Islamic boarding schools.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the application of the problem-based learning model in mufrodat learning in modern Islamic boarding schools effectively addresses the need for more contextual and meaningful Arabic language learning. Through this approach, students are actively involved in building vocabulary understanding through solving authentic problems related to their experiences in the boarding school. Thus, vocabulary mastery is no longer limited to memorisation but develops into functional understanding and more natural communication skills.

Data from observations and interviews show an increase in students' motivation, Confidence, and participation when learning through real-world problems. The shift in the role of teachers from information deliverers to facilitators creates a collaborative, reflective, and more interactive learning atmosphere. PBL has been proven not only to strengthen vocabulary mastery but also to foster critical thinking, cooperation, and independent learning skills. These findings support the views of social constructivism and contextual learning theories, which suggest that language acquisition occurs optimally through social interaction and direct experience.

However, this study also identified several obstacles, including the difficulty some students experienced in using mufrodat spontaneously and the time constraints associated with implementing PBL. Teachers need to prepare relevant problems and manage time effectively so that the learning process remains in-depth and efficient.

In practical terms, the results of this study provide important input for teachers and pesantren administrators. Teachers are advised to design problems that are relevant to students' lives, such as dormitory activities, religious communication, or social interactions, with a level of difficulty appropriate to their abilities. Boarding school can enhance the effectiveness of PBL by fostering an active Arabic-speaking environment, including discussion forums, spontaneous conversations, and language activities outside the classroom.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on Arabic language learning by demonstrating that PBL aligns with the theories of meaningful learning, social constructivism, and embodied cognition. The synergy between linguistic input, contextual experience, and social interaction helps deepen the internalisation of vocabulary meaning and improve language fluency. Further research could expand the application of this model in various educational contexts to assess its long-term impact on productive language skills and students' Confidence.

Future research is recommended to expand on the findings of this study with several exploratory directions, namely: (1) implementing a more rigorous experimental design to obtain more objective and comparable findings, (2) testing the application of this model in Islamic Boarding Schools with different learning settings, system, and cultures to determine the consistency of effectiveness in a broder context, and (3) examining in moe depth the impact of PBL implementation on productive vocabulary development, particulary in speaking and writing skills.

Therefore, the results of this study make a significant contribution to strengthening Arabic language teaching practices in Islamic boarding schools by demonstrating that PBL is a relevant, innovative, and effective learning approach in supporting vocabulary acquisition in a communicative, meaningful, and student-oriented manner.

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