



## **Pemerolehan Aspek Morfologi Bahasa Inggris oleh Siswa SDK Ruteng 1**

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### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pemerolehan morfem dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini meliputi identifikasi, deskripsi, dan interpretasi morfem bahasa Inggris, yang diperoleh oleh 30 siswa sekolah dasar SDK Ruteng I, kecamatan Langke Rembong. Metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif yang dipadukan dengan pendekatan kuantitatif diterapkan untuk mengungkap pemerolehan morfem bahasa Inggris secara komprehensif dan mendalam. Serangkaian observasi kelas, pencatatan, dan perekaman audio digunakan untuk menggali data yang lebih alami terkait dengan bentuk, frekuensi, dan pola morfem. Data dari transkrip dan catatan lapangan dianalisis untuk menemukan bentuk morfem serta mengidentifikasi frekuensi dan pola morfem bahasa Inggris dalam konteks pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Hasil analisis data disajikan dalam bentuk tabel dan grafik. Penarikan simpulan dilakukan berdasarkan hasil data dan temuan penelitian. Verifikasi dilakukan dengan metode triangulasi sumber data dari rekaman dan catatan lapangan. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa morfem bebas dan terikat diperoleh secara berbeda oleh siswa dalam mempelajari kosakata bahasa Inggris. Morfem bebas diperoleh lebih dominan oleh siswa dalam kategori nomina dan verba. Morfem terikat belum banyak diperoleh. Temuan ini menunjukkan urutan pemerolehan aspek morfologi dimulai dari morfem bebas dan selanjutnya ke morfem terikat. Morfem terikat infleksional diperoleh lebih awal dari morfem terikat derivasi. Berdasarkan temuan ini, disimpulkan bahwa pemerolehan morfem dalam bahasa Inggris lebih kompleks karena perbedaan struktur bahasa serta selaras dengan tahapan perkembangan linguistik dari individu pembelajar.

**Kata kunci:** morfologi; morfem; pemerolehan bahasa kedua

## ***Acquisition of Morphological Aspect in English by the Elementary Students at SDK Ruteng 1***

### **Abstract**

*This study aims to explore the acquisition of English morphemes in English Foreign Language classroom at elementary school focusing on types and use of acquired English morphemes. The investigation is concerned with the identification, description, and interpretation of English morphemes acquired by 30 elementary students at SDK Ruteng I in Langke Rembong district. Therefore, descriptive qualitative research method mixed with quantitative approach were applied. a series of classroom observations, note-taking, and audio-recording were utilized to delve into more naturalistic data relating to form and pattern of morphemes. The data from the transcripts and field-notes were analyzed to capture the forms of morpheme as well as to identify frequency and patterns of English morpheme during the acquisition process in EFL learning context. The results of data analysis were displayed in matrix, table and chart, while conclusion drawing and verification were simultaneously conducted at the final procedure. Verification of data was triangulated by comparing the data from recording and field-notes. The findings reveal that free and bound morphemes are acquired differently by students in learning English vocabulary. Free morphemes are predominantly acquired, especially in the categories of nouns and verbs, whereas bound morphemes are less frequently obtained. The findings revealed that the acquisition of morphological aspects follows a sequence, beginning with free morphemes and subsequently progressing to bound morphemes. Among bound morphemes, inflectional morphemes are acquired earlier than derivational morphemes. Based on the*

*findings, it is concluded that the acquisition of morphemes in English is more complex due to different language structures and aligns with the developmental stages of individual learners' linguistic development.*

**Keywords:** acquisition; morpheme; morphology; second language acquisition

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## INTRODUCTION

Language primarily comprises three key interrelated elements, namely form, meaning, and function. Those components are linguistically interconnected. Form, among the other two, is related to linguistic structure covering phonology, morphology, and syntax. Particularly, morphology is concerned with the structure and formation of words through morphemes, the smallest meaningful units of language (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2021). In second language acquisition (SLA), morphemes play a prominent role in bridging a learner's first language with the target language (de Jong, 2020). It means that a thorough grasp of this linguistic component is essential for vocabulary expansion, the construction of grammatically sound sentences, and the recognition of language patterns. Moreover, morphological awareness greatly contributes to fundamental literacy skills such as reading comprehension and written expression, which are vital for both academic and professional achievement (Carlisle, 2010). Therefore, the study of morphology provides a strong foundation of SLA, supporting overall language development and proficiency.

Morphology is crucial beyond merely understanding individual words; it also contributes to the construction of grammatically accurate sentences (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010). This knowledge is particularly fundamental for language learners in the early stages of linguistic development. The role of morphological analysis was revealed in the research by (Majeed et al., 2023), reporting its connection to reading comprehension and vocabulary development for elementary students. In second or foreign language learning, explicit instruction in morphology enhances students' ability in building ramma-

tically correct sentences and arranging word structures effectively.

Moreover, when students develop and improve their language competence, their morphological knowledge strengthens their fluency in both written and spoken language. As such, acquiring morphology provides a strong foundation for further linguistic development and proficiency (Kontkanen, 2024).

Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the process through which individuals learn a language other than their native one, often encountering distinct challenges. In case of English as foreign language (EFL), the acquisition process is fairly complex for learners from different native languages like Indonesian. It provides challenges and difficulties to acquire various language components like morphology in English. A significant difficulty in SLA is mastering the morphological structures of the target language, particularly when they differ from those in the learner's first language. While regular morphemes, such as plural markers (-s) and past tense markers (-ed), tend to be relatively easy to acquire, irregular forms pose greater challenges (de Jong, 2020). The complexity of these morphemes is further intensified by the need for learners to navigate structural differences between their native and target languages, which can either facilitate or impede the learning process. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of morpheme usage in the target language is essential, as it directly impacts the learner's grammatical accuracy and overall fluency.

In elementary learning context, learners encounter a crucial phase of linguistic development, wherein there is a process of shifting from foundational language skills to more sophisticated communication. In this period, the

internalization of language structure, including the role of morphology in word formation and meaning, begins to occur. In this case, it is unarguably true that morphology contributes to the expansion of vocabulary, improvement of reading comprehension, and enactment of writing abilities (Goodwin & Ahn, 2022). As students engage with morphemes through inflection, derivation, and compounding, they develop a deeper understanding of word functions within sentences, which is essential for both academic success and social interaction (Kuo & Anderson, 2006). This is particularly significant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, where students do not only acquire vocabulary and grammar but also be able to apply them effectively in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

As highlighting the significance of morphology aspect for the development of vocabularies, it is required to deeply explore how young learners, including school-aged children at elementary school, engage in the process of acquiring morpheme in second language classrooms. In case of English as foreign language (EFL), acquisition process has been examined to be more engaging and insightful in several studies. Therefore, a thorough analysis of students' morphological development, especially in bilingual and EFL environments, is crucial to identify and address these gaps early on, ensuring that learners receive the necessary support to build a strong foundation in language acquisition (Nippold & Scott, 2021). Several studies have examined the acquisition and use of morphemes in second language acquisition (SLA), addressing significant insights into this area. In the longitudinal study by de Jong (2020), 50 elementary school students learning English as a second language (ESL) in the Netherlands were involved. By applying oral narrative tasks and sentence repetition exercises, the study showed that students acquired inflectional morphemes, such as plural (-s) and past tense (-ed) markers, more effectively when they were provided with explicit instruction

and repeated exposure during classroom activities. However, a cross-sectional study examining morphological processing in 100 Chinese elementary pupils learning English was carried out by Zhang et al. (2020). It was applied to observe the acquisition of morphology from the selected students in a specific time. The study discovered that students with greater morphological awareness were better equipped to decode difficult words and understand texts by using a lexical judgment task and a sentence completion test. The other related findings were found in the research with a quasi-experimental design by Kwon and Kim (2021) studying the acquisition of inflectional morphemes by 80 Korean elementary students in English as a foreign language (EFL) setting. In this experiment, the students were instructed to create written and spoken narratives as part of a task-based method that the researchers used in a quasi-experimental design. The findings revealed that regular morphemes, in the case of past tense and plural markers, were acquired by the students faster than irregular ones. Interestingly, it was stated that the frequency of morphemes in educational materials had a significant impact on students' progress. Further, the previous research findings have been significantly and consistently proved in the most recent research evidence in the studies by (Abbasi et al., 2023; Farid et al., 2023; Ke, 2025).

In the existing studies, narrative writing, sentence repetition, and lexical decision tests have been applied as the techniques to observe the natural and dynamic use of morphemes in classroom interaction. However, the investigation of morpheme acquisition in second or foreign language remains broader and engaging. Apparently, difference of research context, methods, approaches, and focus are still the factors and variables for further investigations to pursue in depth. In the current research, the main focus is concerned with acquisition of English morphemes by the Indonesian-speaking children at elementary school in Ruteng, East Nusa

Tenggara Province. The research approach is a descriptive cross-sectional study in EFL classrooms which focuses on observation of linguistic features of morpheme acquisition within English classes for several meetings. This study aims to investigate the use of morphemes by elementary school students during classroom interactions in an EFL context. By focusing on natural communication in a real-time classroom setting, this research seeks to uncover how students produce and comprehend morphemes while interacting with peers and teachers. Drawing upon the focus of the research, two research questions were explored: (1) What English morphemes do the elementary students acquire in EFL context? And (2) How do elementary school students use morphemes during classroom interactions in the process of second language acquisition?

## RESEARCH METHOD

Acquisition of English morphology was explored in descriptive qualitative and quantitative research method. Mixed research methods were chosen to obtain the comprehensive data and in an in-depth analysis concerning English morpheme acquisition. In the mixed research design, the qualitative data such as words and the numeric data were quantitatively analyzed consecutively. 30 elementary students at SDK Ruteng 1 in Langke Rembong Subdistrict were observed and recorded during several sessions of English course. Accordingly, the qualitative data were utilized to delve into the natural acquisition process of English morpheme in classroom context (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014), while the quantitative data were counted to explain the data in percentages, frequency and significance of occurrences, which is used for providing a clear and systematic understanding of the subject matter (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Recording and note-taking were the techniques used for the data collection. Audio recording recorded the words spoken by the students during the ten sessions of classroom observation. Note-

taking was simultaneously conducted to capture the data related to the acquisition process in classroom setting. Both techniques were employed to gather authentic and rich data for a deeper analysis of English morpheme acquisition in second or foreign language classroom context. The data were interpreted in the qualitative and quantitative model of data analysis. The flow of qualitative data interpretation adopted Miles et.al (2014) comprising three interactive procedures: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the quantitative model, the data were calculated in descriptive statistics for the percentages and frequency of occurrences. The results of data analysis are displayed in matrix, table, and chart. For the verification of the findings, triangulation by source of data and the related studies was conducted at the last procedure.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study is to explore English morpheme acquisition by the primary students in Indonesian EFL classroom contexts. The results of data analysis presented in this section illustrate the acquisition of English morphemes based on types, frequency of occurrences, and percentage. The results are respectively displayed in matrix, table, and bar chart. The given matrix below demonstrates the data of types of English morphemes acquired by the learners in English learning context at elementary school.

### Types of Acquired English Morphemes

English morphemes are typically categorized into three types based on form and function. Form is related to free (base) morpheme and bound morpheme (derivational and inflectional). Accordingly, function is concerned with changing word class and serving grammatical properties. The given data in table below particularly demonstrate the results of morpheme analysis regarding the types of English morphemes acquired by the students at primary school level.

**Table 1. Types of Acquired English Morphemes**

| No | Types of Morpheme      | Forms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Category/pattern                                                                                                  |
|----|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Free morphemes (base)  | Lexical<br>Words: ice, cone, glass, salt, sugar, banana, pizza, study, walk, go, run, read, talk, eat, sleep, work, clean, eat, pick, take, bring, cook, help, take, house, school, library, office, room, toilet, book, pencil, ruler | Noun and Verb<br>Noun + {Ø}<br>Verb + {Ø}                                                                         |
| 2. | Derivational morphemes | Suffix: teacher, beautiful, farmer, swimmer, walker, player, quickly, happily, careful, cheerful, playable, understandable                                                                                                             | Verb + {-er}<br>Noun + {-ful}<br>Adj+{-ly}<br>Verb + {-able}                                                      |
| 3. | Inflectional morphemes | Inflection: bananas, apples, glasses, apples, and eating, cleaned, helped, cleaning, packing, cooking, biggest                                                                                                                         | Plurality {-s/-es},<br>regular past form<br>verb {-ed}, present<br>participle {-ng}<br>Superlative form<br>{-est} |

The data in table 1 show that the English morphemes acquired by the primary students are subsumed under three main types, namely free morphemes, derivational (bound) morphemes, and inflectional (functional) morphemes. Free morphemes are the lexical morphemes which typically have the base or root without attaching to any other morphemes to form meaning. In other words, these free morphemes are the base form which can stand alone and are completely meaningful (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010). Based on form, those instances of free morphemes shown in the data are mostly noun and verb. In case of derivational morphemes, the learners attached suffixes {-er}, {-ful}, {-ly}, {-able} to the ending of base morphemes. These derivational morphemes were applied to form noun, adjective, and adverb. It is more complex word formation process as there is consequently a change of parts of speech. The other complicated cases found in the data were the formation of bound morphemes by the attachment of inflection {-s/es}, {-ed}, {-ing}, {-est}.

These were used to indicate grammatical functions such as plurality, regular past form verb, present participle verb, and superlative form. The inflectional morphemes have undergone the similar process to derivational morphemes, that is adding inflection to the final part of the base morpheme. Yet, the morphological process led to different formation. The insertion of suffixes to free morphemes changed parts of speech for the derived words, for instance the word “teacher” was altered from verb into noun, indicating an agent (doer). Conversely, the inflectional morphemes did not shift a part of speech for the base morphemes. The words “bananas, apples, glasses” remain unchanged as noun. The results of the study reveal that the students have acquired more free morphemes than bound morphemes. The free morphemes showcase the acquisition of concrete nouns and verbs closely associated with the zone proximal development.

Further, the data in the following table indicate the occurrences of the acquired English morphemes. Each type of morpheme appeared in a different amount over several classroom

observation. The different prevalence was related to the students' morphological development and the EFL learning context in classroom.

### The Use of the Acquired English Morphemes

The use of those three types of English morphemes were figured out by their occurrences in vocabularies acquired by the students. The case in point is clearly displayed in the data below.

**Table 2. The occurrence of the acquired English morphemes**

| Types of morpheme     | Obs 1 | Obs2 | Obs3 | Obs4 | Obs5 | Obs6 | Total |
|-----------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Free Morpheme         | 15    | 20   | 30   | 40   | 55   | 58   | 218   |
| Derivational Morpheme | 3     | 5    | 3    | 7    | 10   | 5    | 33    |
| Inflectional Morpheme | 5     | 8    | 15   | 25   | 12   | 17   | 82    |

It is evident that the occurrence of free morphemes was at the highest frequency. There was a positive trend toward the increasing number of English vocabularies acquired by the elementary students. The data also highlight the most dominant use of free morphemes. Additionally, the increasing number of free morphemes over time of observation demonstrates the expansion of English vocabulary acquired by the students. It can be stated that free morphemes were early acquired by the young learners for the basic form and literal meaning. The acquisition is along with the students' language development in which content words like noun and verb are early acquired and internalized (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). The acquisition of free morphemes enables the students to express English words with basic meaning. Contrastively, bound morphemes, like derivational and inflectional morphemes, were at the lower frequency, showing the complexity of word formation acquired by the students.

This finding suggests that EFL learners acquire morphemes in a relatively predictable order, similar to native speakers and second language learners. The process is affected by such factors as the learner's first language, exposure to English, instruction methods, and cognitive development. Common challenges include difficulty with inflectional morphemes (e.g., -s, -ed) due to differences between English and the learner's native language. In addition, the data of the acquired morphemes by the elementary students did not follow the order of acquisition stated in Krashen hypothesis (Purnamaningwulan, 2020).

### The Significance of the Acquired English Morpheme Occurrences

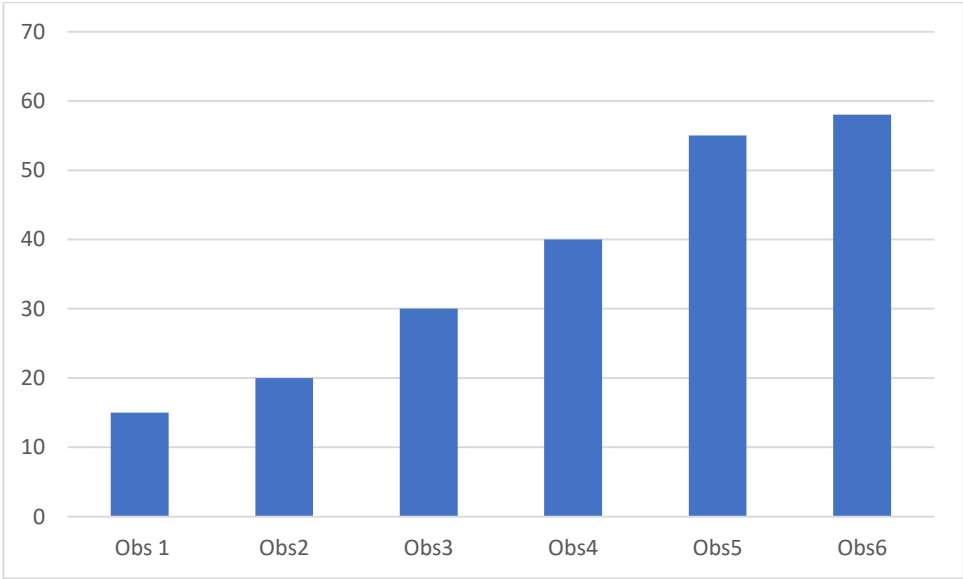
Statistically, the data of the acquired English morpheme were examined by the chi-square and p-value analysis. The results of the data analysis is clearly shown in the following table.

**Table 3. Chi-square and p-value analysis**

| Statistic                       | Value                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Test Used                       | Chi-square Test of Independence |
| Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )         | 12.7401                         |
| Degrees of Freedom (df)         | 10                              |
| p-value                         | 0.2386                          |
| Significance Level ( $\alpha$ ) | 0.05                            |
| Result                          | Not Significant                 |

In reference to the results of the statistical analysis shown in table 3 above, the study found that there was no significant difference between the acquisition of free morphemes and the other morphemes statistically. The p-value was 0.2386, and significance level was 0.05.

To show the trend of English morpheme acquisition across six classroom observations, the figures below demonstrate the data for the respective type of morphemes in sequence. The first figure displays the data of the gradual increase and development of free morpheme (lexical) acquired in the EFL primary classroom.



**Figure 1. Trend of English Morpheme Acquisition within six observations**

The figure illustrates a steady progression in the acquisition of free morphemes across six observations, indicating a continuous learning pattern among the learners. Initially, the acquisition is relatively low in Obs1 and Obs2. However, a consistent increase was observed in Obs3 and Obs4, proving that learners have gradually developed their ability to acquire free morphemes over time. The highest levels of acquisition were recorded in Obs5 and Obs6, suggesting that learners have attained greater development in utilizing free

morphemes. This pattern is consistent with theories of natural language acquisition, proposing that learners exhibit gradual improvement as their exposure and practice increase (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

The last figure visualizes the data regarding the acquisition of derivational and inflectional morphemes. Evidently, the acquisition process of both morphemes undertaken, regardless of morphological relations in word formation, turns out to be a slow progress.

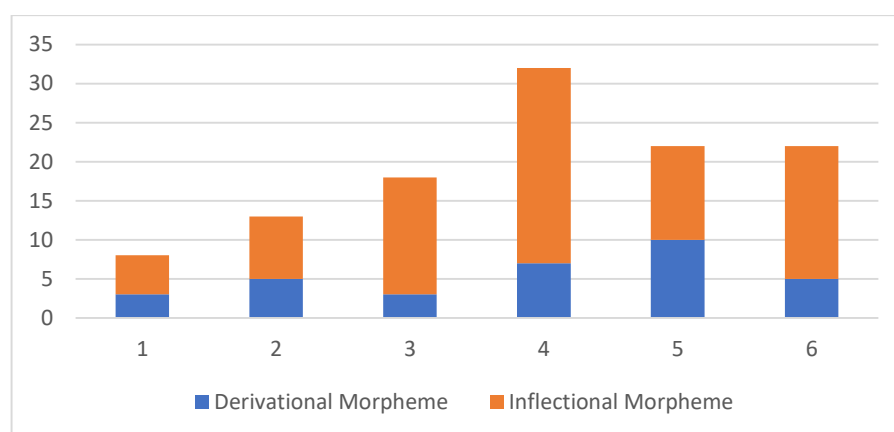


Figure 2. Acquisition of Derivational and Inflectional Morphemes

Inflectional morphemes are consistently acquired in greater numbers than derivational morphemes across all observations. The findings are related to theory of second language, stating that inflectional morphemes (e.g., -s, -ed, -ing) are typically learned earlier than derivational morpheme (Troike & Saville, 2006). In this study, derivational morphemes (e.g. -er, -ful, -ly) showed a slower and steadier growth, indicating the learners require a deeper understanding of word formation. The sharp increase up to Observation 4 suggests that learners were in a rapid acquisition phase, likely benefiting from structured instruction and practice. The subsequent decline in Observations 5 and 6 may indicate learning saturation point, where students need reinforcement to progress further. A shift of focus toward other linguistic aspects might have slowed down explicit morpheme acquisition.

As seen in the data, derivational morphemes appeared less frequently in early observations but increase gradually over time. This pattern reflects their greater linguistic complexity, requiring learners to understand semantic shifts rather than just grammatical structure. The increase in derivational morphemes in Observations 5 and 6, despite the slight decline in overall morpheme acquisition, may indicate that learners begin focusing on expanding their vocabulary and word-formation knowledge in later stages.

### Implications to English Teaching and Future Study

Drawing upon the findings of the study, it is apparent that the acquisition of English morphemes is progressing along with the learners linguistic competence. Therefore, the findings suggest practical and theoretical implications for English Language Teaching (ELT) and future research. Practically, acquisition of English morphemes can be boosted by providing an explicit instruction, more comprehensible inputs and rich language exposure in line with the development of the learners linguistic competence. The teaching process should prioritize and focus on acquisition of English morphemes in a sequence, ranging from free morphemes to derivational and inflectional ones. Theoretically, the findings underscore the strong basis for the application of the interrelated theories such as second language acquisition (SLA), teaching English as foreign language (TEFL) and Zone Proximal Development. Methodologically, the limitations of the cross-sectional design imply that future studies will benefit from mixed-methods approaches including large sample of students to provide a more comprehensive and depth exploration of the phenomenon.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate a progressive enhancement in students' proficiency with both free and bound morphemes over the course of four sessions. The continuous increase in the use of free morphemes, alongside the notable growth in bound morphemes, particularly inflectional morphemes, revealing that the students have gradually expanded their vocabulary and refined their grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, the steady rise in the acquisition of inflectional morphemes, in contrast with the fluctuation observed in derivational morphemes, underscores the dynamic and non-linear nature of language acquisition. While students exhibited consistent progress in mastering inflectional morphemes, the variability in derivational morpheme usage suggests the need for more targeted instructional support and practice to reinforce their application. Overall, these findings address the significance of interactive teaching methodologies and sustained practice in facilitating linguistic development.

The findings offer insights and implications to English Foreign Language Teaching and learning. Since inflectional morphemes show rapid growth, instruction should shift toward derivational morphemes in later stages. Teaching strategies such as morphological awareness activities, contextual learning, and word-formation exercises could help sustain progress. For the elementary level, the teachers can help the students acquire derivational morphemes by applying various interactive word games such as Go Fish, Morpheme Bingo, Quizlet, and Morpheme Story.

For further investigation, it would be beneficial to examine the elements that affect the variations in the usage of derivational morphemes, such as task complexity or student involvement. Furthermore, implementing longitudinal studies could deliver more in-depth perspectives on the sustained progress of morphological skills and whether the

identified patterns are durable. Comparative research across various instructional approaches and classroom settings might also yield valuable understanding regarding the most effective methods for promoting morphological growth. Finally, investigating the impact of peer interactions and cooperative activities on encouraging the use of morphemes could illuminate the social dynamics that shape language learning. These research domains could enhance our comprehension of the factors influencing students' morphological advancement and assist in refining language instruction techniques.

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