

Improving Students' English Vocabulary Mastery Using Crossword Puzzles for VII Grade Students at SMP Negeri 3 Palu

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Abstract

English vocabulary mastery is a crucial aspect for students' development as it significantly impacts their ability to comprehend and communicate in the language. However, there is a gap between the expected vocabulary mastery and the reality. The factors such as lack of interest and ineffective teaching methods are frequently the main causes in such cases. Therefore, this research aims to address these issues by enhancing English vocabulary mastery among students at SMP Negeri 3 Palu through the implementation of crossword puzzles as a teaching method. In this study, the researcher employs in two cycles. The findings indicate that the use of crossword puzzles significantly improves students' vocabulary mastery. In the first cycles, 57.69% of students achieved the minimum score (KKM), which increased to 80.76% in the second cycles. This demonstrates that crossword puzzles are an effective method to enhance students' vocabulary comprehension and motivation to learn. Thus, this study concludes that integrating crossword puzzles into English language learning can offer a practical and engaging solution to enhance students' vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: *vocabulary, crossword puzzles.*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is a crucial component in language proficiency, particularly in understanding and using words in English, both verbally and in writing. As stated by Hidayati (2020), proficiency in vocabulary mastery plays a primary role in the English language learning process. When someone has limitations in vocabulary mastery, their ability to effectively convey thoughts becomes hindered. However, despite the importance of vocabulary mastery, this aspect is often overlooked in English language education at schools.

Observations indicate that students' interest in learning English is still low, which ultimately affects their level of vocabulary mastery. One of the factors causing low vocabulary mastery among students is the lack of attractiveness in teaching methods aimed at improving vocabulary comprehension. This condition makes learning English at the junior high school level challenging for students if their English vocabulary is limited. Consequently, students encounter

difficulties in understanding the material, expressing ideas or thoughts, and even communicating in English.

To address this issue, the author strives to enhance students' English vocabulary mastery through various methods, including selecting relevant and diverse learning media, as well as implementing suitable teaching models. According to Astuti (2020), the selection of teaching methods significantly influences the quality of the students' learning process. The use of appropriate teaching methods can stimulate students' interest and engagement in the learning process in the classroom.

In an effort to improve English vocabulary mastery, crossword puzzles emerge as an engaging and interactive tool to be utilized in education. The use of crossword puzzles helps students develop and expand their vocabulary in a fun and effective manner. As stated by Zaini (2019), crossword puzzle games are effective and entertaining learning methods without compromising the substance of the learning process. Moreover, this strategy encourages active participation from students right from the beginning of the learning process.

Therefore, the author conducted research with the aim of enhancing vocabulary mastery through crossword puzzles for students in class VIII C at SMP Negeri 3 Palu. Through this teaching method, it is expected that students' vocabulary mastery abilities can significantly improve. This research aims to address the issue of low vocabulary mastery in English language education at the junior high school level and provide an effective solution to enhance students' English language proficiency.

METHOD

Subjects of Research

The subjects of this study are the students of class VIII C at SMP Negeri 3 Palu, with a total of 32 students involved. The researcher chose this class because class VIII C had drawn special attention due to the significant number of students exhibiting substantial difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. These challenges are evident in their ability to comprehend the materials, communicate fluently, and construct correct sentences. Moreover, this class has been the focus of intensive observation since the early stages of the classroom action research began. From the observation shows the students in this class tend to face greater challenges compared to other classes, both in terms of learning motivation and vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, class VIII C is considered the appropriate group to evaluate the effectiveness of innovative teaching methods, such as the use of crossword puzzles, in enhancing English vocabulary mastery.

Instruments

The data collection techniques used in this study included observation and tests, with the main instruments being observation sheets and tests specifically designed to evaluate vocabulary mastery. The observation sheets served to record important data during the learning process, including ensuring whether the teacher carried out activities according to the planned teaching modules. Through these observations, the researcher could monitor the interactions between the teacher and students, the teaching methods employed, and the responses and participation of the students during the lessons.

In addition to observations, tests were used as the primary instrument to measure students' vocabulary mastery. The tests consisted of 20 questions focused on the use of regular and irregular verbs. These questions were designed to assess students' ability to recognize, understand, and

correctly use regular and irregular verbs in sentences. The test results were then analysed to determine the extent to which students had mastered the taught vocabulary and to identify areas that still needed improvement. By combining observations and tests, the researcher could obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the teaching methods used and the level of vocabulary mastery among the students.

Procedures

This research aims to enhance students' vocabulary mastery in English language learning through the application of the crossword puzzle technique. The study will be conducted in two cycles, which include planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Observations will be conducted collaboratively involving peers to monitor classroom learning activities.

The first cycle will commence with planning, involving problem identification, material preparation, lesson plan development, and evaluation instrument preparation. Subsequently, actions will include pre-test implementation and teaching with the crossword puzzle technique. Intensive observation will then monitor the learning process and students' responses to the method used. The results of the first cycle will be reflected upon to evaluate success and make necessary improvements.

The second cycle will begin with lesson plan revisions based on the reflections from the first cycle. Additional instruments such as post-tests will be prepared to measure vocabulary improvement after the treatment. Teaching will be conducted again using the refined method, and observations will monitor changes and progress. The results of the second cycle will be analyzed thoroughly to evaluate the effectiveness of using the crossword puzzle technique in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery.

Thus, this research procedure will provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the crossword puzzle technique in English language learning and developing more effective teaching strategies in the future.

Data Analysis

The data analysis techniques used in this study include both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative techniques are used to analyze numerical data obtained from students' vocabulary mastery tests. This quantitative data is calculated based on the maximum scores achieved by each student, which are then used to determine their final scores. Meanwhile, qualitative techniques are employed to analyze non-test data collected from observations of students during the learning process. This qualitative data is gathered through detailed observations, focusing on changes in student behaviour and participation in class. These observations provide in-depth insights into student interactions, levels of participation, and their responses to the teaching methods applied.

This study is considered successful if it meets the predetermined minimum performance indicators, which include significant improvements in vocabulary mastery and student engagement in the learning process. The minimum performance indicators are as follows:

- a. After implementing the crossword puzzle teaching method, students' vocabulary mastery improves, with the average score exceeding the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75.
- b. Student engagement in the learning process increases, with more than 75% of the total number of students in the class actively participating.

By achieving these indicators, the teaching method applied can be considered effective in enhancing students' vocabulary and active learning participation.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Classroom Action Research was conducted in two implementation cycles from July to August 2023. The learning process in this study is divided into three main stages: initial, core, and final stages. The initial stage begins with routines such as greetings, prayers, attendance recording, and the delivery of apperception. Apperception is used to connect the previous material with the content that will be taught by the teacher. Additionally, in this stage, the teacher explains the learning objectives to be achieved, providing guidance for the students.

In the core stage, the crossword puzzle method is used as the main tool in the learning process. The first cycle involves several critical steps. The first step is planning, which includes the development of learning tools, preparation of teaching media, and the creation of assessment rubrics. The lesson plan is designed to significantly enhance the students' vocabulary comprehension. The next step is action, which involves two meetings in each cycle. In applying the crossword puzzle teaching method, the steps include: 1) delivering the lesson material according to the competencies to be achieved, 2) explaining the steps of the crossword puzzle method by the teacher, 3) distributing activity sheets that align with the lesson material, 4) students answering questions by filling in the correct letters in the boxes, and 5) the teacher assessing the students' worksheets. In this stage, the researcher conducts tests related to recount text material, particularly concerning regular and irregular verbs. The test is formatted as a crossword puzzle with 20 questions. Students must fill in the answers according to the provided clues and boxes.

In the first cycle, the research activities were considered less satisfactory, with the research achievement indicators not fully met. The test results from cycle 1 showed that out of the students who took the test, 15 students, or 57.69%, achieved scores above 75, meeting the minimum completeness criteria (KKM), while the remaining 11 students (42.30%) did not reach the KKM. The average score in cycle 1 was 73.38, with the highest score being 100 and the lowest score being 30. The detailed scores from first cycle indicate that the crossword puzzle method requires some adjustments to be more effective. The second cycle is planned to address existing barriers with modifications in teaching strategies and increased interaction between teachers and students. It is hoped that these improvements will result in a significant increase in students' vocabulary mastery and their active participation during the learning process. This research aims to ensure that all students can achieve the minimum performance indicators set. The detailed scores from cycle 1 are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Scores of Cycle 1

No	Results (number)	Results (letter)	Number of Students	Percentage
1	91-100	A	6	23,07%
2	82-90	B	4	15,38%
3	75-81	C	5	19,23%
4	<75	D	11	42,30%

From the analysis of the table, it is evident that 6 students (23.07%) scored between 91-100 (A), 4 students (15.38%) scored between 82-90 (B), and 5 students (19.23%) scored between 75-81 (C). However, 11 students (42.30%) received a D, or below 75. Consequently, only 15 students (57.69%) managed to achieve the minimum passing grade (KKM) in cycle 1, while the remaining students did not meet the criteria. Although the students' vocabulary mastery in cycle 1 showed

fairly good results, these outcomes did not fully meet the expected research achievement indicators.

During the learning process, the researcher also observed the students' responses to the teaching method. Observations from cycle 1 revealed that students responded positively to the crossword puzzle method. The level of student enthusiasm was documented in the observation sheets prepared by the researcher. However, several challenges were encountered during the cycle 1 learning process. One major issue was the unavailability of an LCD projector to display the crossword puzzle media in front of the class. Additionally, some students experienced confusion and lacked motivation during the lessons due to difficulties in understanding the material and the method of solving the crossword puzzles. As a result, the time required to complete the tasks was longer than initially planned. These challenges prompted the researcher to implement several corrective actions in cycle 2, including:

1. Providing a deeper understanding of the taught material.
2. Offering more guidance to students on how to better solve the puzzles.
3. Preparing crossword puzzles on cardboard as an alternative media if the projector is unavailable.
4. Ensuring that the learning activities proceed according to the planned schedule.

In cycle 2, the researcher continued with the material introduced in cycle 1, focusing on addressing the issues identified previously. The planning for this stage included minimal changes, maintaining the development of learning tools, preparation of teaching media, crafting learning scenarios, and formulating assessment rubrics. The researcher also prepared crossword puzzles on cardboard to ensure a smooth learning process in case the projector was again unavailable.

During the action stage, the researcher provided intensive guidance to students who had low test scores. Classroom and time management were given extra attention to ensure effective learning. The researcher also introduced various vocabulary tests, such as filling in the blanks and matching words, which were then discussed together in front of the class. During these tests, students showed high enthusiasm and eagerness, often competing to answer questions on the board.

The test results in cycle 2 indicated a significant improvement. A total of 21 students, or 80.76%, reached the KKM, while 5 students (19.23%) still did not meet the criteria. The average score of the students in this cycle was 81.08, with the highest score being 100 and the lowest score being 50. The detailed scores from cycle 2 are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Scores of Cycle 2

No	Results (number)	Results (Letter)	Number of Students	Percentage
1	91-100	A	8	30,76%
2	82-90	B	12	46,15%
3	75-81	C	1	3,84%
4	<75	D	5	19,23%

Based on the data in the table above, 8 students (30.76%) scored between 91-100 (grade A), 12 students (46.15%) scored between 82-90 (grade B), and 1 student (3.84%) scored between 75-81 (grade C). However, there are still 5 students (19.23%) who have not reached the minimum mastery criteria (KKM) with scores below 75. Thus, from the data, it can be concluded that 21 students have achieved the KKM in cycle II. The results obtained in cycle II indicate that all the



performance indicators of the research have been met well, prompting the researcher to conclude the classroom action research.

When comparing cycle I and cycle II, a significant difference is evident in the students' vocabulary mastery. In cycle I, the average percentage of students exceeding the KKM was 57.69%, while in cycle II, this figure increased to 80.76%. This indicates a substantial improvement in students' vocabulary skills after the improvements made in cycle II. In the first cycle, challenges such as the students' lack of understanding of the material and the crossword puzzle method, as well as technical issues like the unavailability of a projector, impacted the students' learning outcomes. However, after various improvements were implemented in cycle II, including providing a deeper understanding of the material, offering intensive guidance, and supplying alternative media, the students' learning outcomes showed significant improvement.

Students were more enthusiastic and active during the learning process, as recorded in the observation sheets. This improvement is not only reflected in the students' scores but also in their attitude and participation during the learning process. Thus, this research has successfully achieved its goal of enhancing students' vocabulary mastery through the crossword puzzle method. For further details, please refer to the comparison table between cycles below;

Table 3. Comparison of the Learning Achievement from Cycle 1- Cycle 2

Comparison of Students' Learning Achievement in Cycle 1 and 2					
Action	Not Successful	Percentage	Successful	Percentage	Mean Score
Cycle 1	11	42,30%	15	57,69%	73,38
Cycle 2	5	19,23%	21	80,76%	81,08

Based on the data in Table 3, it can be concluded that the assessment of vocabulary mastery test results has shown a significant improvement and all research achievement indicators have been met. This indicates that the use of the learning method using crossword puzzles has successfully improved the English vocabulary mastery of students, as well as increasing their learning motivation. The positive response given by students when participating in learning with this method also becomes an important point that adds to the success of this method.

This research is supported by previous studies conducted by Yuana (2021), which stated that the use of crossword puzzle methods successfully increased the English vocabulary mastery of class VIII A1 students at SMP Negeri 6 Singaraja. Research conducted by Cabana (2020) also supports this finding by stating that the application of crossword puzzle methods is effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery. The data shows an increase in the number of students who achieve learning completeness from cycle 1 to cycle 2. In cycle 1, only 50% of students achieved learning completeness, while in cycle 2, this percentage increased dramatically to 90.63%.

Thus, the results of this research confirm that the application of crossword puzzles in the learning process has a significant positive impact on increasing students' understanding of vocabulary. The use of this method is not only effective in improving learning outcomes but also able to make students more enthusiastic and motivated in learning English.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the results of implementing the crossword puzzle strategy to improve English vocabulary mastery, it can be concluded that this method is effective in enhancing

students' mastering of vocabulary in Class VIII C of SMP Negeri 3 Palu. The improvement observed in the learning cycle results indicates the success of this method. Therefore, it can be confirmed that the implementation of the crossword puzzle strategy contributes positively to improving students' vocabulary mastery.

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