



Improving Students' Vocabulary through Pictionary Board Game

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Abstract

This research aimed to improve students' vocabulary mastery through the Pictionary board game at the second grade of SMPN 2 Baula. The problem addressed was how the Pictionary board game strategy could improve students' vocabulary mastery. This study used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following Kemmis and Taggart's model, comprising two cycles of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting, and was conducted collaboratively with an English teacher. The subjects were 20 students of class VIII.A. Data were collected through a 30-item multiple-choice vocabulary test and observation sheets covering both student and teacher activity, then analyzed by calculating the mean score and the percentage of students meeting the minimum mastery criterion (KKM = 70). The results showed that students' mean vocabulary score increased from 46.16 in Cycle I, with only 4 students (20%) passing, to 81.81 in Cycle II, with 16 students (80%) passing, thereby meeting the predetermined success criterion. Observed student and teacher activity likewise improved from the "enough" category in Cycle I to the "very good" category in Cycle II. It is concluded that the Pictionary board game is an effective strategy to improve junior high school students' vocabulary mastery and can be recommended as an alternative technique for English vocabulary instruction.

Keywords: *Classroom action research, junior high school students, Pictionary board game, vocabulary mastery.*

Introduction

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of second and foreign language learning because learners need sufficient lexical knowledge to understand messages and express their ideas effectively. Vocabulary knowledge, however, involves more than simply memorizing word meanings. Learners need to develop knowledge of word forms, meanings, and uses and gradually transform receptive knowledge into productive vocabulary knowledge (Schmitt, 2019). Research has also demonstrated that vocabulary learning is a gradual process that benefits from repeated encounters with target words and opportunities to establish connections between word forms and meanings. Rice and Tokowicz (2019), for example, emphasize that effective vocabulary learning requires more than simple repetition because learners need to develop strong connections among orthographic, phonological, and semantic representations. Therefore, vocabulary instruction should provide learners with opportunities to encounter, retrieve, and use new words through meaningful learning activities.

In classroom contexts, vocabulary learning may become less effective when students are primarily exposed to teacher explanation, memorization, and decontextualized word lists. Although direct vocabulary instruction remains important, learners also benefit from activities that provide meaningful opportunities to interact with and retrieve target words. Research by Chang (2019) demonstrates that different forms of language input can contribute to vocabulary development, while repeated exposure can

strengthen learners' knowledge of target words. Similarly, Pavia et al. (2019) found that repeated exposure to vocabulary through songs positively contributed to vocabulary learning. These findings suggest that vocabulary instruction should incorporate learning activities that expose students to target words repeatedly while encouraging them to actively process and retrieve those words.

A preliminary observation at SMP Negeri 2 Baula found that students in the second grade experienced considerable difficulty in learning English vocabulary. Many students appeared bored and passive during lessons, partly because vocabulary instruction was conducted through conventional and relatively monotonous activities. Students also experienced difficulties in following spoken English and recalling the meanings of everyday English words. These difficulties limited their participation in classroom activities and indicated the need for an instructional strategy that could provide greater opportunities for active vocabulary practice. In this context, game-based learning represents a potentially appropriate alternative because games can create interactive learning environments in which students participate actively while working with language materials.

Recent research provides substantial support for the use of game-based approaches in vocabulary learning. Zou et al. (2019), in a systematic review of digital game-based vocabulary learning research, reported generally positive effects on vocabulary learning, motivation, engagement, and learner interaction. Their review suggests that game-based environments can provide learners with opportunities to encounter vocabulary in engaging contexts rather than through isolated memorization alone. Similarly, Chen et al. (2019) found that learners who used an English vocabulary learning application incorporating game-related functions achieved significantly better vocabulary acquisition and retention than learners who used the same application without game-related functions. These findings indicate that game elements may enhance students' involvement in vocabulary learning and support the acquisition and retention of new lexical items.

Game-based learning can also provide opportunities for collaboration and active participation. Research on vocabulary learning in technology-mediated environments has shown that collaborative and interactive learning conditions can contribute positively to vocabulary development. For example, vocabulary learning activities that combine interaction, learner autonomy, and collaboration can create richer learning environments in which learners actively process new words rather than merely receive information from the teacher. Such findings are relevant to classroom games because students are generally required to interact with peers, respond to clues, retrieve vocabulary, and negotiate possible answers. Consequently, games can transform vocabulary learning from an individual memorization activity into a more interactive and socially mediated learning process.

One game that is particularly relevant to vocabulary instruction is the Pictionary game. Pictionary is a picture-based guessing activity in which one player represents a word or concept through drawing while other players attempt to identify the target word. In language learning contexts, this activity creates a direct connection between visual representation and lexical production. Hamer and Lely (2019) specifically examined the use of the Pictionary Game in English language instruction and reported that the game could be used to increase learners' vocabulary mastery while providing enjoyable language practice. Their findings are particularly relevant to the present study because Pictionary requires learners to associate vocabulary with visual representations and subsequently retrieve the corresponding English words.

The pedagogical value of Pictionary can also be explained through research on multimodal vocabulary learning. Feng and Webb (2020) found that vocabulary could be learned through different modes of input, including reading, listening, and viewing. Their findings indicate that vocabulary learning is not restricted to a single form of linguistic input and that visual and multimodal exposure can contribute to vocabulary development. In the Pictionary game, students encounter vocabulary through a combination of visual representation, oral interaction, guessing, and written production. This combination potentially provides multiple pathways through which learners can establish connections between the target word and its meaning.

Another important consideration in vocabulary teaching is the need to encourage retrieval and active production. Schmitt (2019) identifies the development of vocabulary from receptive knowledge toward productive mastery as an important issue in vocabulary research. In Pictionary, students are not only exposed to the meaning of a word but are required to retrieve the corresponding lexical item when interpreting a drawing. Students who draw must also recall the target word and represent its meaning visually, while their teammates must retrieve possible vocabulary items and produce them orally.

Therefore, the game provides repeated opportunities for lexical retrieval and production, which are important components of developing more usable vocabulary knowledge.

The selection of vocabulary items should also be considered carefully when implementing a game-based strategy. Vocabulary learning materials should not simply contain randomly selected words but should consider factors such as frequency, usefulness, and difficulty. He (2019) demonstrated that vocabulary selection can be improved by considering the frequency, usefulness, and difficulty of target words. This consideration is relevant to the present study because the vocabulary used in the Pictionary Board Game needs to be appropriate for the students' proficiency level and sufficiently concrete to be represented through pictures. Vocabulary related to classroom objects, objects in nature, animals, fruits and vegetables, parts of the body, and means of transportation is therefore appropriate because these lexical items can generally be represented visually and connected to students' everyday experiences.

The Pictionary Board Game can consequently be adapted as a classroom vocabulary-learning strategy rather than used merely as recreational entertainment. In the present study, students work in small groups, and selected students draw target vocabulary on the board while their group members attempt to identify the corresponding English word. After the guessing activity, students write the vocabulary items and receive clarification from the teacher regarding meaning, pronunciation, and spelling. This procedure allows the game to incorporate several stages of vocabulary learning, including visual recognition, lexical retrieval, oral production, written production, and feedback. Such a procedure is consistent with the broader argument that vocabulary instruction should involve multiple dimensions of word knowledge rather than focusing exclusively on memorizing definitions (Schmitt, 2019).

The use of games, however, does not automatically guarantee successful vocabulary learning. The effectiveness of game-based instruction may depend on how the activity is designed, the level of difficulty, the amount of learner involvement, and the relationship between the game mechanics and the intended learning objectives. Yang et al. (2020) demonstrated that game design and task difficulty need to be appropriately balanced because competitive game elements can improve learning performance but may also increase anxiety when the level of challenge is inappropriate. Although their study focused on a digital vocabulary-learning environment, the implication is also relevant to classroom games such as Pictionary. Teachers therefore need to establish clear rules, select vocabulary appropriate to students' proficiency levels, distribute opportunities to participate fairly, and provide sufficient support for students who are less confident.

Previous research has provided evidence for both the general effectiveness of game-based vocabulary learning and the potential of Pictionary as a vocabulary-learning activity. Hamer and Lely (2019) specifically demonstrated the usefulness of Pictionary for vocabulary instruction, while broader research has shown that game-based learning can promote vocabulary acquisition, learner engagement, motivation, and interaction (Chen et al., 2019; Zou et al., 2019). Nevertheless, further classroom-based research is needed to examine how a non-digital Pictionary Board Game can be implemented with junior high school learners in an Indonesian EFL context, particularly through a Classroom Action Research design. The present study therefore seeks to address this need by examining the use of the Pictionary Board Game to improve vocabulary mastery among second-grade students of SMP Negeri 2 Baula.

Based on this background, the present study was designed as Classroom Action Research to investigate how the Pictionary Board Game could improve students' English vocabulary mastery. The study focuses on vocabulary related to classroom objects, objects in nature, animals, fruits and vegetables, parts of the body, and means of transportation. The study is expected to contribute theoretically to the discussion of game-based vocabulary instruction and practically to provide an alternative strategy for teachers who seek to make vocabulary learning more interactive, engaging, and participatory. Through the integration of drawing, guessing, speaking, and writing, the Pictionary Board Game is expected to provide students with repeated opportunities to retrieve and use target vocabulary in a supportive classroom environment.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a collaborative Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following the model of Kemmis and Taggart (1998), which consists of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting across cycles. The researcher acted as the teacher delivering the lesson, while a collaborating English teacher

acted as observer, recording student and teacher activity throughout each session. Each cycle was evaluated against a predetermined success criterion; if the criterion was not met, the results of reflection were used to design an improved plan for the following cycle.

Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at SMPN 2 Baula, located in Puubunga Village, Baula Subdistrict, Kolaka Regency, during the 2023/2024 academic year. The subjects were 20 students of class VIII.A, consisting of 10 male and 14 female students (as recorded on the class roll, with some variation reflected in attendance across meetings). This class was selected because preliminary interviews with the English teacher and students indicated that class VIII.A had markedly lower vocabulary mastery than other classes and that students had particular difficulty understanding the teacher's spoken English.

A cycle's success was judged against two criteria agreed upon with the collaborating teacher: a process criterion, requiring students to be visibly more active in the vocabulary lesson than in previous meetings, and a product criterion, requiring at least 80% of students to score 70 or above on the evaluation test. Individual scores were further classified into five descriptive bands to support the process criterion, 80-100 as very good, 66-79 as good, 56-65 as fair, 26-55 as poor, and 0-25 as very poor, which allowed the researcher and the collaborating teacher to judge not only whether the product target was met but also how the class as a whole was progressing between cycles.

Procedure

Prior to the intervention, the researcher conducted preliminary research through classroom observation and an interview with the English teacher to confirm students' vocabulary difficulties. In the planning stage of each cycle, the researcher and the collaborating teacher prepared lesson plans, selected the Pictionary board game as the teaching strategy, designed the observation sheet, arranged supporting media (picture cards and a drawing board), and set the success criteria: the process criterion required students to be visibly more active in the vocabulary lesson, while the product criterion required at least 80% of students to reach a score of 70 or higher.

In the implementation stage, each cycle consisted of four meetings of approximately 80 minutes. Each session followed the same three-part structure. In the pre-activity, the teacher opened the class, greeted the students, and introduced the day's topic. In the whilst-activity, the class was divided into two teams; the teacher provided a box of picture cards, and students took turns drawing a picture on the board while their group attempted to write down the corresponding vocabulary, continuing until every student had taken a turn, after which the group with the most correct words was declared the winner. In the post-activity, the teacher reviewed the vocabulary that had been introduced, gave feedback and scores to each group, and motivated students to review the material at home. The fourth meeting of each cycle was reserved for the vocabulary evaluation test rather than a new game session.

Observation was carried out simultaneously with implementation: the collaborating teacher observed and scored the researcher's teaching activity, while the researcher observed and scored the students' activity, both using structured observation sheets. In the reflection stage following each cycle, the researcher and the collaborating teacher jointly analyzed the observation and test data to determine whether the success criteria had been met and, if not, to identify problems to address in the next cycle's planning.

Instruments and Data Collection

Two instruments were used to collect data. The first was a 30-item multiple-choice vocabulary test, validated prior to use, covering vocabulary related to the topics taught in each cycle; this test was administered once at the end of each cycle. Table 4 presents the blueprint used to construct the Cycle I test, distributing items across the topics of classroom objects, objects in nature, animals, and occupations. The second instrument was a structured observation sheet used to record both student and teacher activity during every meeting, allowing the collaborating teacher and the researcher to track engagement and instructional quality across the cycle.

Table 1. Vocabulary Test Blueprint

Topic	Indicator	Number of Items
Names of objects in the classroom	Understanding vocabulary, correct placement, function in sentences, and pronunciation of classroom objects	5
Names of objects in nature	Understanding vocabulary, correct placement, function in sentences, and pronunciation of objects in nature	5
Names of animals	Understanding vocabulary, correct placement, function in sentences, and pronunciation of animal names	10
Names of occupations	Understanding vocabulary, correct placement, function in sentences, and pronunciation of occupation names	10

Data Analysis

Test scores were calculated as the number of correct answers divided by the total number of items, multiplied by 100. Individual scores were classified into seven bands ranging from 0-40 (very poor) to 90-100 (excellent), and the mean score of each cycle was calculated using the formula $Md = \sum d / N$, where $\sum d$ is the total of students' scores and N is the number of students (Arikunto, 2007). The percentage of students meeting the success criterion was calculated using $P = (F / N) \times 100$, where F is the number of students who passed and N is the total number of students. A cycle was considered successful once at least 80% of students achieved a score of 70 or higher, the school's minimum mastery criterion (KKM).

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Preliminary research conducted before the intervention confirmed that vocabulary mastery among students of class VIII.A was low compared with other classes, with students struggling to recall or use everyday English words and showing low motivation to participate in class.

In Cycle I, the researcher and the collaborating teacher first prepared the lesson plans, picture cards, and observation sheets, and agreed that the cycle would address the names of objects in the classroom, objects in nature, and animals across three teaching meetings, with a fourth meeting reserved for the evaluation test (Table 2). At the first meeting, held on 15 July 2024, the researcher opened with a simple question, "can you name the objects in class?", to which the class responded with silence; only after the question was repeated in Indonesian ("dapatkah kalian menyebutkan nama-nama benda di kelas?") did a student respond with examples such as buku, meja, kursi, papan tulis, and pulpen. This pattern, initial silence followed by a bilingual prompt, recurred at the second meeting on 16 July 2024, when students were asked to name objects found in nature; only one student answered correctly ("mountain and sea"), while most others remained quiet.

By the third meeting, on 19 July 2024, focusing on animal names, slightly more students were willing to respond in English, with one student correctly naming "cat, dog, and cow" before the game began. During the game itself, errors were still common: in one instance, a student drew a guinea pig but a teammate wrote "mouse," prompting laughter from the group before the researcher supplied the correct term. The fourth meeting, on 22 July 2024, was devoted entirely to the 30-item vocabulary evaluation test, which was administered after the researcher confirmed that all students understood the test instructions.

Observation of student activity across the three teaching meetings of Cycle I rose from a mean of 1.9% to 2.2% and then 3.0%, remaining within the "enough" category, while teacher activity rose from 2.8% to 3.1%. The evaluation test produced a mean score of 46.16, with only 4 of 20 students (20%) reaching the KKM of 70 and the remaining 16 students (80%) failing to do so. Reflection identified several recurring obstacles (Table 4): some students changed seating positions without instruction and appeared to treat the game as a race to finish rather than a vocabulary exercise; others continued chatting with classmates instead of attending to the lesson; and many still struggled to translate the vocabulary items

into Indonesian even after the game had been played several times. Because the product criterion of 80% of students passing was not met, the researcher and the collaborating teacher revised the lesson plan and proceeded to a second cycle.

In Cycle II, conducted between 23 and 30 July 2024, the game was applied to new vocabulary topics, fruits and vegetables, parts of the body, and means of transportation, again across three teaching meetings with a fourth reserved for the evaluation test (Table 2). At the first meeting, on 23 July 2024, the same bilingual pattern was used to introduce the topic (“apakah kalian tau nama buah dan sayur?”), but this time several students responded immediately with examples such as apel, mangga, kentang, and wortel, indicating greater willingness to participate than at the equivalent point in Cycle I. At the second meeting, on 26 July 2024, focusing on parts of the body, a few students correctly named “nose, eyes, lips” before the game began, although one student still confused “eyelashes” with “eye” during the activity, drawing laughter from the group before the researcher corrected the response.

By the third meeting, on 29 July 2024, covering means of transportation, engagement was noticeably higher: when one student drew a bus, a teammate immediately and correctly wrote “bus,” producing visible enthusiasm in the group. The fourth meeting, on 30 July 2024, was again devoted to the vocabulary evaluation test, administered under the same procedure as in Cycle I.

Observation of student activity in Cycle II improved to 3.4%, 4.1%, and 4.2% across the three teaching meetings, reaching the “very good” category, while teacher activity improved from 3.5% to 4.2%. The evaluation test produced a mean score of 81.81, with 16 of 20 students (80%) passing the KKM and only 4 students (20%) failing. Because this met the predetermined success criterion of 80% of students scoring at least 70, the research was concluded after two cycles. Reflection in Cycle II confirmed that the problems identified after Cycle I had largely been resolved (Table 4): students followed group instructions more consistently and completed the game within the allotted time, remained focused on the lesson rather than chatting with classmates, and were able to translate vocabulary items with noticeably fewer errors.

Table 2 outlines the vocabulary topics covered in each meeting, Table 3 summarizes the comparison of mean scores and observed activity between the two cycles, Table 4 compares the problems identified in Cycle I with the corresponding improvements observed in Cycle II, and Table 5 lists the full set of vocabulary items introduced across both cycles.

Table 2. Vocabulary Topics Taught in Each Meeting

Cycle	Meeting	Vocabulary Topic	Sample Items
I	1	Names of objects in the classroom	globe, bookshelf, blackboard, chalk, eraser, flag, map, ruler
I	2	Names of objects in nature	cloud, air, lake, mountain, forest, sea, snow, beach
I	3	Names of animals	snail, seal, bat, whale, leopard, camel, buffalo, peacock
I	4	Evaluation test (Cycle I)	30-item multiple-choice vocabulary test
II	1	Names of fruits and vegetables	apple, mango, grapes, dragon fruit, potato, carrot, spinach
II	2	Parts of the body	eye, head, eyebrow, eyelashes, nose, chin, lips, finger
II	3	Names of transportation	train, motorcycle, pedicab, cruise ship, submarine, plane
II	4	Evaluation test (Cycle II)	30-item multiple-choice vocabulary test

Table 3. Comparison of Students' Vocabulary Mastery and Activity between Cycle I and Cycle II

Indicator	Cycle I	Cycle II
Mean vocabulary test score	46.16	81.81
Students passing KKM (≥ 70)	4 students (20%)	16 students (80%)
Students' activity (Meeting I-III)	1.9% $\rightarrow$ 2.2% $\rightarrow$ 3.0% (Enough)	3.4% $\rightarrow$ 4.1% $\rightarrow$ 4.2% (Very good)
Teacher's activity (Meeting I-III)	2.8% $\rightarrow$ 3.0% $\rightarrow$ 3.1% (Enough-Good)	3.5% $\rightarrow$ 4.0% $\rightarrow$ 4.2% (Good-Very good)

Table 4. Problems in Cycle I and Corresponding Improvements in Cycle II

Problem Identified in Cycle I	Corresponding Improvement Observed in Cycle II
Students had difficulty understanding the Pictionary board game procedure and some changed positions without instruction	All students followed group instructions and completed the game within the allotted time
Some students were not serious in following the learning process and talked with classmates	Students focused on the teacher's explanation and stopped chatting during the activity
Students still had difficulty translating vocabulary items into Indonesian	Students were able to translate vocabulary independently with fewer errors

Table 5. Vocabulary Items Introduced in Cycle I and Cycle II

Topic	English	Indonesian
Objects in the classroom	Globe	Globe bumi
	Bookshelf	Rak buku
	Blackboard	Papan tulis
	Chalk	Kapur
	Eraser	Penghapus
	Flag	Bendera
	Map	Peta
	Ruler	Penggaris
	Tie	Dasi
	Hat	Topi
Objects in nature	Cloud	Awan
	Air	Udara
	Lake	Danau
	Mountain	Gunung
	Forest	Hutan
	Sea	Laut
	Snow	Salju
	Sun	Matahari
	Beach	Pantai
	Flower	Bunga
Animals	Snail	Siput/keong
	Seal	Anjing laut
	Bat	Kelelawar
	Whale	Ikan paus
	Leopard	Macan tutul
	Camel	Unta
	Buffalo	Kerbau
	Peacock	Merak
	Parrot	Burung beo
	Giraffe	Jerapa
Fruits and vegetables	Apple	Apel
	Mango	Mangga
	Grapes	Anggur
	Dragon fruit	Buah naga
	Pomegranate	Delima
	Chives	Daun bawang
	Potato	Kentang
	Carrot	Wortel
	Spinach	Bayam
	Broccoli	Brokoli
Parts of the body	Eye	Mata
	Head	Kepala

Transportation	Eyebrow	Alis
	Eyelashes	Bulu mata
	Nose	Hidung
	Chin	Dagu
	Lips	Bibir
	Finger	Jari-jari
	Stomach	Perut
	Foot	Kaki
	Train	Kereta api
	Motorcycle	Sepeda motor
	Wagon	Delman
	Pedicab	Becak
	Cruise ship	Kapal pesiar
	Cargo ship	Kapal pengangkut barang
	Submarine	Kapal selam
	Plane	Pesawat
	Helicopter	Helikopter
	Rocket	Roket

Discussion

The results indicate that the implementation of the Pictionary board game was associated with substantial improvement in the vocabulary mastery of second-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Baula. The proportion of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) increased from 20% in Cycle I to 80% in Cycle II, accompanied by an increase in the mean vocabulary score. From an applied linguistics perspective, this improvement is important not simply because students obtained higher test scores, but because the classroom activity created repeated opportunities for learners to encounter, retrieve, negotiate, and produce lexical items through interaction. The findings therefore suggest that Pictionary may function as more than an entertaining classroom activity; it can serve as a structured environment for facilitating lexical learning through visual representation, retrieval, and peer interaction.

The finding is consistent with Hamer and Lely (2019), who reported that the use of the Pictionary game contributed to an improvement in learners' vocabulary mastery. Their findings provide direct support for the present study because both studies employ Pictionary as a vocabulary-learning strategy rather than using games merely as a general motivational activity. The similarity is particularly relevant because the central pedagogical feature of Pictionary is the integration of lexical retrieval with visual representation. Learners must move between a word, its meaning, and its visual representation, creating multiple opportunities to process the same lexical item.

The improvement can also be interpreted in relation to the nature of vocabulary learning itself. Vocabulary acquisition involves more than the initial recognition of a word. Learners gradually develop knowledge of lexical form, meaning, pronunciation, spelling, and use through repeated encounters and opportunities to retrieve and apply words (Schmitt, 2019). In the present study, students did not simply receive vocabulary from the teacher. They were required to interpret drawings, search their existing lexical knowledge, propose possible answers, listen to their classmates' responses, confirm or reject alternatives, and sometimes reproduce the target words orally or in writing. The activity consequently created a cycle of visual recognition → lexical retrieval → verbal production → feedback, which may have supported the consolidation of vocabulary knowledge.

This interpretation is consistent with Rice and Tokowicz (2019), whose review of second-language vocabulary training research emphasizes the importance of deliberate learning conditions and repeated opportunities for practice. From this perspective, the value of Pictionary does not necessarily lie in the game format itself. Rather, its pedagogical value may derive from the learning processes that the format makes possible. A well-designed game can increase the number of meaningful encounters with target vocabulary while simultaneously requiring learners to retrieve words rather than merely recognize them on a vocabulary list.

The visual component of Pictionary provides another important explanation for the observed improvement. In the activity, vocabulary is represented not only through written or spoken language but also through drawings produced by the students. Learners therefore encounter a lexical item through

several interconnected modes: visual representation, spoken guessing, written form, and, in some cases, oral production. Feng and Webb (2020) demonstrated that vocabulary learning can occur through different modes of input, although the effectiveness of different modes depends on the learning conditions and learner characteristics. The present findings are consistent with this multimodal perspective because the visual element was embedded within an interactive activity rather than presented as isolated pictures.

The multimodal nature of Pictionary is particularly relevant in lower-secondary EFL classrooms. Learners at this level may still depend considerably on concrete representations when developing their lexical repertoire. Words referring to objects, body parts, food, transportation, places, and other concrete concepts can readily be connected with visual representations. The drawing therefore provides an additional semantic cue that can assist learners in accessing the target lexical item. However, this does not mean that visual support is equally appropriate for every vocabulary item. Abstract words, grammatical expressions, and culturally specific concepts may require additional contextualization, explanation, examples, or sentence-level practice.

The findings are also consistent with research demonstrating the potential of game-based approaches for vocabulary learning. Yang et al. (2020) found that a competition-based game could positively influence EFL students' English vocabulary learning performance while also affecting their learning behaviors and anxiety. Although their study employed a digital competition game rather than a traditional Pictionary board game, the underlying principle is relevant to the present findings: game-based learning can combine vocabulary practice with interaction, challenge, and immediate participation. Similarly, Zou et al. (2019) reviewed research on digital game-based vocabulary learning and emphasized the growing interest in games as environments that can support vocabulary learning through interaction and repeated practice.

The present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that game-based vocabulary instruction does not necessarily depend on sophisticated digital technology. A board, drawing materials, vocabulary cards, and classroom interaction can provide learners with opportunities to engage actively with lexical items. This is particularly relevant to schools where access to digital devices, stable internet connections, or language-learning software may be limited. In such settings, low-cost activities such as Pictionary may provide teachers with a practical means of increasing opportunities for vocabulary practice without requiring substantial technological infrastructure.

The improvement across cycles also demonstrates the importance of reflection and instructional adjustment in classroom action research. Several problems emerged during Cycle I, including students' unfamiliarity with the game procedure, limited seriousness during the activity, and difficulties in translating vocabulary into appropriate drawings. These difficulties are pedagogically significant because they demonstrate that the effectiveness of a classroom game is mediated by implementation. During Cycle II, clearer explanations of the rules, closer monitoring, and greater teacher assistance were introduced. The subsequent improvement in participation and vocabulary scores suggests that the intervention became more pedagogically effective as the teacher adapted the activity to students' needs.

This finding is consistent with a central principle of classroom-based language pedagogy: instructional activities do not operate independently of classroom management, learner familiarity, task design, and teacher mediation. In other words, the improvement should not be attributed exclusively to the label "Pictionary." Rather, it is more appropriate to understand the intervention as a combination of the game, teacher scaffolding, repeated practice, peer interaction, and increasingly effective classroom implementation. This distinction is important when interpreting classroom action research because the intervention evolves through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

The increased student activity observed during the second cycle may also be associated with the motivational and interactional characteristics of game-based learning. Pictionary provides learners with a clear communicative purpose: one learner produces a visual representation while other learners attempt to identify the corresponding lexical item. This creates a reason to listen, observe, think, respond, and negotiate possible answers. Rather than waiting for the teacher to provide the correct vocabulary item, learners are required to mobilize their existing lexical resources. Hamer and Lely (2019) similarly demonstrated the potential of Pictionary to support vocabulary mastery, suggesting that its interactive nature can make vocabulary practice more attractive to learners.

From an interactionist perspective, this feature is particularly important. Vocabulary learning does not occur exclusively through individual memorization; classroom interaction can create opportunities for learners to notice forms, receive feedback, test hypotheses about word meanings, and hear alternative lexical choices from peers. The Pictionary activity creates such opportunities in a relatively low-stakes environment. Students can propose an answer, receive immediate confirmation or correction, and continue participating without the interaction necessarily being dominated by teacher questioning.

The improvement may also be explained by repeated retrieval. During the Pictionary activity, the same vocabulary items could appear several times through drawing, guessing, correction, repetition, and writing. Such repeated encounters are important because knowing a word involves more than recognizing its meaning once; learners gradually develop knowledge of lexical form and meaning through multiple encounters and opportunities for retrieval (Schmitt, 2019). Chang (2019) similarly demonstrated that different forms of repeated input can contribute to second-language vocabulary learning across multiple dimensions. Although Chang's study focused on narrow reading and listening rather than classroom games, the underlying implication is relevant to the present study: repeated encounters with target vocabulary provide learners with additional opportunities to consolidate lexical knowledge.

Importantly, however, repeated exposure should not be equated automatically with effective learning. The quality of retrieval matters. When learners are required to actively search their memory for a word, the learning process differs from simply seeing the same word repeatedly. Pictionary creates such retrieval demands because students must reconstruct the lexical item from a visual representation. The task therefore combines repetition with active retrieval, potentially making each encounter more cognitively engaging than passive exposure to a vocabulary list.

The role of learner engagement is also important when interpreting the findings. In Cycle I, some students remained passive and appeared uncertain about how to participate in the activity. After the teacher clarified the procedures and students became more familiar with the game, participation increased in Cycle II. This development suggests that game-based instruction may require an initial adaptation period. The positive effect of a game cannot be assumed simply because the activity is entertaining. Teachers need to establish clear rules, select appropriate vocabulary, organize groups, provide modelling, monitor participation, and ensure that the game remains focused on the intended learning outcomes.

This consideration is consistent with broader research on vocabulary instruction, which emphasizes that the quality of instructional design and learning conditions influences vocabulary outcomes (Schmitt, 2019). In this sense, the teacher's role remains central even when instruction is described as "game-based." The teacher determines which lexical items are introduced, how they are represented, how students are grouped, how feedback is provided, and how the vocabulary is subsequently recycled. Pictionary should therefore be conceptualized as a teacher-mediated learning task rather than a self-sufficient instructional method.

The vocabulary topics used in Cycle II may also have contributed to the stronger improvement. The topics included fruits and vegetables, parts of the body, and means of transportation, which are relatively concrete and can easily be represented through drawings. In contrast, some vocabulary in Cycle I, particularly objects in nature, may have been more difficult for students to represent visually. This observation highlights an important issue in vocabulary pedagogy: **task-word compatibility**. The usefulness of Pictionary depends partly on whether the target vocabulary can be represented clearly enough for learners to infer the intended lexical item.

He (2019) emphasizes the importance of appropriate vocabulary selection in language teaching, particularly because the usefulness and learnability of vocabulary items should be considered when deciding which words to teach. Thus, teachers implementing Pictionary should select vocabulary that is appropriate to students' proficiency levels and sufficiently concrete to be represented visually. When less concrete or abstract vocabulary is required, Pictionary may need to be supplemented with contextualized sentences, definitions, demonstrations, realia, gestures, or short communicative tasks.

The present findings are broadly comparable with previous studies of Pictionary and related guessing games. Efiza (2017) and Rianty (2018) reported improvements in students' vocabulary mastery following the implementation of Pictionary activities with elementary school learners. Hamer and Lely

(2019) similarly found that Pictionary could be used to increase learners' vocabulary mastery. Malik (2019), although using the Back to the Board game rather than Pictionary, also reported a substantial improvement in students' vocabulary achievement following a game-based intervention. Taken together, these findings suggest that visual guessing and collaborative game activities can provide useful alternatives to conventional vocabulary instruction.

The consistency across these studies is noteworthy because the interventions were implemented with different learners, educational levels, and classroom contexts. At the same time, the differences between these contexts caution against treating all game-based vocabulary activities as equivalent. The specific vocabulary selected, proficiency of the learners, duration of treatment, grouping arrangements, teacher involvement, and assessment procedures may all influence outcomes. The present study therefore contributes another classroom-based example rather than definitive evidence that Pictionary will produce the same magnitude of improvement in every EFL setting.

The present findings can further be understood through the distinction between vocabulary recognition and productive vocabulary use. The Pictionary activity primarily required students to recognize a visual representation and retrieve the corresponding lexical item. However, students also had opportunities to pronounce, spell, and write the words when giving or confirming answers. The activity therefore potentially engaged several dimensions of vocabulary knowledge rather than meaning alone. Schmitt (2019) argues that vocabulary knowledge is multidimensional and that vocabulary instruction and assessment should consider more than simple word recognition.

This distinction has implications for interpreting the present assessment results. An increase in multiple-choice vocabulary scores provides evidence of improved recognition, but it does not necessarily demonstrate that students can use the newly learned words spontaneously in communication. The learning process may therefore benefit from extending Pictionary beyond the guessing stage. After identifying the word, students could be asked to pronounce it, spell it, provide a definition, classify it, use it in a sentence, or incorporate it into a short dialogue. Such extensions would move learners from receptive recognition toward more productive and communicatively useful vocabulary knowledge.

The findings also have implications for the relationship between visual learning and vocabulary retention. Pictionary requires students to convert a lexical item into an image and then reconstruct the lexical item from another student's image. This two-way relationship between word and image may provide learners with an additional retrieval pathway. Feng and Webb (2020) showed that vocabulary learning can occur through different input modes, including reading, listening, and viewing, although the relative effectiveness of modes varies according to learning conditions. In the present study, viewing was not used independently; it was integrated with speaking, guessing, drawing, listening, and writing. The improvement should therefore be interpreted as the outcome of a multimodal and interactive learning process rather than visual exposure alone.

The multimodal dimension is particularly relevant when considering English learning in multilingual Southeast Asian school contexts. Malaysian secondary schools, for example, operate within a multilingual educational environment in which English is taught as an additional language and where current language education has been influenced by CEFR-oriented approaches. Research on CEFR implementation in Malaysian secondary schools has highlighted the importance of considering how internationally referenced proficiency frameworks are translated into local classroom practice. In such contexts, classroom activities that provide meaningful opportunities for learners to interact with English can complement more formal language instruction.

This provides a useful regional comparison for the present Indonesian context. The educational systems of Indonesia and Malaysia are not identical, and the linguistic and curricular conditions should not be treated as interchangeable. Nevertheless, both contexts involve learners who develop English alongside other languages and who may have limited opportunities to use English extensively outside the classroom. For such learners, classroom activities that increase the frequency and meaningfulness of vocabulary encounters may be pedagogically valuable. Pictionary can potentially address this need because it creates a relatively structured environment in which learners repeatedly attend to English lexical items while interacting with classmates.

From a Malaysian school perspective, this is also relevant to the broader movement toward communicative and proficiency-oriented English education. Rather than treating vocabulary as a list of words to be memorized for assessment, vocabulary can be integrated into communicative classroom

activities in which learners need to retrieve and use lexical items to accomplish a task. The Pictionary activity can contribute to this orientation when the game is followed by activities that require students to use the newly learned vocabulary beyond the immediate guessing context. Thus, the value of Pictionary lies not only in making vocabulary learning enjoyable but also in its potential to create a bridge between lexical knowledge and classroom interaction.

Nevertheless, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that Pictionary is universally superior to other vocabulary teaching techniques. The study involved only 20 students from one class at SMP Negeri 2 Baula and was conducted over two classroom action research cycles. In addition, the improvement may have been influenced by several factors, including students' increasing familiarity with the game, the teacher's improved classroom management, the selection of vocabulary topics, and repeated exposure to the target words. The results therefore represent evidence from a particular classroom context rather than a basis for broad generalization.

This limitation is important because vocabulary learning is influenced by multiple factors, including input, learner characteristics, instructional design, and opportunities for meaningful practice (Schmitt, 2019). In classroom action research, improvement across cycles should therefore be interpreted primarily as evidence that the revised instructional practice was more successful under the specific conditions of the classroom. The design does not allow the improvement to be attributed exclusively to Pictionary independently of other changes introduced between cycles.

Another limitation concerns the assessment procedure. The present study used multiple-choice vocabulary tests to measure students' improvement. Although this technique is practical and can provide a clear indication of students' recognition of vocabulary, it may not fully capture productive vocabulary knowledge. Students may be able to identify the correct answer without necessarily being able to pronounce, spell, or use the word independently in communication. Future research could therefore combine multiple-choice tests with productive measures such as word-definition tasks, spelling tests, oral production, sentence construction, or short communicative tasks.

Such an approach would provide a more comprehensive picture of whether Pictionary improves not only vocabulary recognition but also students' ability to use newly learned words. It would also allow researchers to investigate whether the benefits observed immediately after the intervention are retained over time. A delayed post-test would be particularly valuable because vocabulary mastery should ideally involve relatively durable lexical knowledge rather than short-term recognition immediately following classroom practice.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Pictionary board game can function as a practical, low-cost, and engaging strategy for vocabulary instruction. Its pedagogical value appears to derive from the combination of visual representation, repeated retrieval, peer interaction, learner engagement, and opportunities for active vocabulary production. The findings are supported by previous research showing the potential of Pictionary and other game-based approaches for vocabulary learning (Hamer & Lely, 2019; Yang et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2019).

However, the contribution of Pictionary should be understood in relation to how the activity is designed and implemented. Effective use requires careful vocabulary selection, clear procedures, teacher scaffolding, equitable participation, appropriate grouping, and opportunities to recycle vocabulary after the game. Pictionary should therefore not be viewed simply as an entertaining classroom game. Rather, it can be conceptualized as a structured lexical-learning task that provides repeated and meaningful opportunities for learners to notice, retrieve, negotiate, and use English vocabulary.

The present study also suggests a potentially productive direction for future research in Southeast Asian EFL contexts. Comparative studies involving Indonesian and Malaysian secondary learners could investigate whether the effects of visual and game-based vocabulary instruction vary according to learner proficiency, multilingual background, curriculum orientation, classroom interaction patterns, and opportunities to encounter English beyond the classroom. Such research would move beyond the question of whether Pictionary "works" and instead examine **for whom, under what conditions, and through which learning processes** visual game-based vocabulary instruction is most beneficial.

In this sense, the contribution of the present study is not simply that students obtained higher vocabulary scores after the second cycle. More importantly, the findings illustrate how a relatively simple classroom task can be redesigned through teacher reflection to increase opportunities for lexical

retrieval, multimodal processing, and peer interaction. This provides a useful pedagogical lesson for resource-constrained EFL classrooms: innovative vocabulary instruction does not necessarily depend on sophisticated technology, but on the quality of the learning opportunities created around the target language.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the Pictionary board game strategy improved second-grade students' vocabulary mastery at SMPN 2 Baula. The mean vocabulary test score increased from 46.16 in Cycle I to 81.81 in Cycle II, with the proportion of students meeting the minimum mastery criterion rising from 20% to 80%, meeting the study's predetermined success criterion. Observed student and teacher activity likewise improved from the "enough" category in Cycle I to the "very good" category in Cycle II. These results indicate that the Pictionary board game is an effective and accessible alternative strategy for teaching vocabulary in a junior high school setting.

Several suggestions follow from this research. For students, the Pictionary board game can be used independently as a way to review and memorize new vocabulary outside the classroom. For English teachers, the strategy is recommended as a practical option for increasing students' active participation and motivation during vocabulary lessons, provided sufficient time is given to explaining the rules clearly at the outset. For school administrators, providing facilities and materials that support game-based learning, such as picture cards and drawing boards, would help teachers apply this and similar strategies more consistently. For future researchers, this study suggests further investigation into how topic familiarity interacts with game-based strategies, as well as trials of the Pictionary board game with other grade levels or language skills.

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