JOEEL
Journal of English Education and Literature
Vol.5 No.1. 2024

IMPROVING ENGLISH VOCABULARY PROFICIENCY THROUGH THE 'SAVE THE HANGMAN' GAME METHOD

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First Received: 12-01-2024; Accepted: 12-03-2024

Abstract

Improving English Vocabulary Proficiency by Using Save the Hangman Game Method to Students of Class VIII B in SMPN 11 Pontianak in Academic Year 2022-2023. Using the Hangman game method, this study aimed to enhance English vocabulary proficiency among eighth-grade students in Class VIII B at SMPN 11 Pontianak during the 2022-2023 academic year. It employed a Class Action Research approach, focusing on implementing the Save the Hangman game at SMPN 11 Pontianak. The research consisted of two cycles involving planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data collection instruments included observation sheets for student and teacher activities, vocabulary tests, and a questionnaire. The findings indicated a 7% increase in vocabulary skills from the first cycle (62%) to the second cycle (70%), reaching the passing criteria of a score above 61. The quality of teacher activity improved by 10%, from 64.52% in the first cycle to 74% in the second cycle. Additionally, student engagement in active learning increased by 14% for very active criteria (from 41% to 55%) and by 16% for active criteria (from 29% to 45%). However, the percentage of students considered active enough decreased by 5% (from 14% to 9%), and no students fell into the less active criteria in the second cycle. Overall, the findings support the efficacy of the Save the Hangman game method in fostering vocabulary development in the classroom setting.

Keywords: English vocabulary, Hangman, Vocabulary mastering.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to master a language is closely tied to one's command of its vocabulary. Similar to how a child learns a language, the initial step involves acquiring and understanding words and their meanings. Difficulties comprehending a language can arise from various factors, including a lack of vocabulary understanding. A strong vocabulary enables effective interaction, communication, and information exchange within diverse contexts (Hestiana & Anita, 2022; Wu, 2018; Sari & Aminatun, 2021). One can communicate with a small quantity of grammar, but it is almost only possible to communicate with sufficient vocabulary (Utami, 2014). Teaching vocabulary is difficult because English has many words (Rohmatillah, 2012; Suardi

& Sakti, 2019; Anuthama, 2010; Hambali,2018). Based on the K-13 guideline, seventh-grade students are expected to comprehend the main idea of a text and construct coherent and sequential spoken and written texts with accurate, acceptable, and fluent use of linguistic elements. However, to achieve proficiency in composing texts and grasping the main idea, students must first master vocabulary. Unfortunately, many junior high school students still struggle with vocabulary acquisition.

Preliminary observations revealed several problems in the teaching process that may contribute to students' inadequate vocabulary mastery. Firstly, students need help understanding the meanings of words encountered in texts. When encountering unfamiliar words, they often feel confused and unable to comprehend their meanings. Rather than referring to an English dictionary, only a few students attempt to do so. This lack of vocabulary knowledge hinders their ability to define words in English. Secondly, student participation in English learning could be much higher. Some students exhibit signs of drowsiness, falling asleep, causing disruptions in the classroom, and frequently seeking permission to leave the class. Students also need help in memorizing words. This research was evident from their comments on their challenges in learning English. Memorization of words poses a significant difficulty for them. When asked to recall the names of objects in the classroom and some previously learned adjectives, some students struggle, indicating their struggle with word memorization. Lastly, the researcher observed that the teacher still employs conventional teaching techniques in English classes. This approach fosters excessive dependence on the teacher. When students were asked to translate English texts into Indonesian independently, they needed help translating unfamiliar words and frequently sought assistance from the teacher to understand their meanings. After identifying the vocabulary-related problems students face, the researcher concludes that the dominant issue lies in the English teaching technique, particularly the conventional approach, which hampers student engagement in teaching and learning. To overcome these problems mentioned above, various methods can be employed to teach vocabulary, particularly for junior high school students. One effective technique involves incorporating games to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. This approach offers an alternative method for expanding students' vocabulary, as games foster active student participation and engagement during classroom learning processes. Inspired by these considerations, the research article was entitled " Improving English Vocabulary Proficiency

Through The 'Save The Hangman' Game Method: A Study on Class VIII B Students at SMPN 11 Pontianak in The Academic Year 2022-2023." The choice of this method is influenced by the statement that "The brain is biologically have been programmed to remember information that has a strong emotional content" (Wolfe, 2001), "We know that emotions are essential in the educational process because that is what arouses attention, which in turn generates learning and memory" (Sylwester, 1995). Games have a major role in student-centered learning, enabling them to engage in learning fully" (Paul, 2003; Thongmak, 2019; Del Blanco, Torrente, Moreno-Ger & Fernández-Manjón, 2010; Yu & Wang, 2021; Zulkifli, 2019). Also, the brain is naturally inclined to remember information with emotional significance, and emotions play a vital role in the learning process. Games, in particular, have a significant role in student-centered learning and facilitate active engagement in the learning process. This statement reinforces the researcher's decision to incorporate games into the research.

METHOD

This study used a Classroom Action Research design consisting of 2 cycles, with a total of 2 meetings, and each meeting lasts for 2 hours of lessons (2 x 40 minutes). This research was conducted in SMP Negeri 11 Pontianak Academic Year 2022/2023. This school was located on Jl. Achmad Marzuki, Pontianak. The subject of this class action research were students of class VIII B, consisting of thirty-one students, sixteen male students, and fifteen female students. Implementation of the action and data collection began in March 2023. The factors studied were teacher activity, student activity, and the ability to master English vocabulary using the hangman game method. The research instruments used were (1) student activity observation sheets, (2) sheets of observation of teacher activity, (3) test of student learning outcomes, and (4) a questionnaire. The results of this study were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively to see an increase in the activity of students and teachers as well as student's learning outcomes. The success of the action is determined based on the following criteria: (1) activity teachers meet good criteria, (2) student's activities meet good criteria, and (3) ability student's vocabulary meets individual and classical learning mastery criteria. The criteria for filling in the observation sheet of teacher activity and student activity are as follows.

Table 1. Observation Sheet Assessment Criteria

Value	Teacher's Activities	Students 'activities
1	Not done at all.	Less
2	Done but in small part	Decent
3	Carried out according to the procedure but in small part	Good
4	Carried out according to the procedure	Very good

This table outlines assessment criteria for teacher's and student's activities on the Observation Sheet. Scores range from 1 to 4, with one being not done (for teachers) or less engaged (for students) and 4 indicating excellent performance – fully executing activities according to the procedure. The criteria offer a concise framework for evaluating the effectiveness of teacher and student actions during observations.

Table 2. Observation Sheet Assessment Categories

No	Percentage	Category
1	0-25	Less
2	26-50	Decent
3	51-75	Good
4	76-100	Very good

This table delineates assessment categories on the Observation Sheet based on percentage scores. These categories provide a concise and straightforward reference for evaluating performance levels associated with the corresponding percentage ranges during observations. The success of this classroom action research hinges on several critical criteria. First and foremost, it is deemed successful when a student's learning activities align with the standards for excellence. Similarly, the effectiveness of the research is contingent on the teacher's teaching activities meeting the criteria for excellence. Lastly, the attainment of students' vocabulary proficiency in line with the defined standards for excellence is a crucial indicator of the success of this classroom action research. In essence, the overall success is gauged by the convergence of these three pivotal factors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Cycle I

Action Planning Phase

The researcher conducted the action planning phase by undertaking the following steps: (a) creating a lesson plan with Recount material, (b) creating worksheets/handouts, (c) creating a teacher's activity observation sheet, (d) creating a student's activity observation sheet, (e) creating learning evaluation instruments, (f) preparing teaching tools and materials, and (g) consulting with the supervisor and scheduling the research for the designated observers.

Action Implementation Phase

The first action of cycle one was carried out on Monday, March 14th, 2023. The implementation took place in the VIII B classroom of SMP Negeri 11 Pontianak, from 8.30 AM to 10.00 AM, with permission from the subject teacher, Susanty Mekar, S.Pd. The activities consisted of three stages: initial activity (5 minutes), core activity (60 minutes), and closing activity (15 minutes). This first action was necessary for collecting initial data for the classroom action research.

In this phase, the teacher presented the material on recount texts and informed the students unfamiliar with vocabulary, such as nouns and verbs. The teacher also practiced pronunciation by asking the students to read the displayed text aloud using PPT Slides. The teacher briefly explained the text structure as this action research focused on vocabulary. In this first action, the teacher started using the “save the hangman game method," considering the classroom situation was highly conducive and ready to receive the teaching material/method. All students were involved in the hangman game without exception. In this first action, the teacher prepared assigned numbers to play, and from each predetermined group, one student stepped forward to draw a turn number.

Observation and Evaluation Phase

In this phase, observation is conducted during the ongoing teaching and learning process by observing the activities of both students and teachers using observation sheets. Evaluation is carried out at the end of each cycle. The following are the results of the teacher's activity observation in cycle 1.

Results of Teacher's Activity Observation in Cycle

The observation of the teacher's activities in Cycle 1 focused on assessing various indicators of engagement quality throughout different lesson phases. The evaluation provides a comprehensive teacher performance overview based on specified criteria and scores. During the initial activity, the teacher displayed a commendable performance, scoring 80 in greeting students politely and expressing gratitude. Inquiring about the students' well-being and providing information about competencies and learning objectives were also positively rated, scoring 80 and 70, respectively. The core activity involved presenting a recount text, practicing pronunciation, introducing a game, and engaging students in various tasks. Overall, the teacher performed well, scoring 70 to 80. Noteworthy aspects included effectively explaining the purpose of the game "Save the Hangman," dividing students into groups, and monitoring the learning process to prevent distractions. In the final closing activity phase, the teacher gave students opportunities to ask questions and express opinions, which received a score of 70.

Inquiring about difficulties encountered, summarizing lesson content, conducting assessment/reflection, and providing feedback and reinforcement all received scores ranging from 65 to 75. The total score for the teacher's activity observation in Cycle 1 was 1.245, with an average score of 62. It corresponds to a percentage of 62%, reflecting an overall satisfactory performance. The assessment was based on a set of 20 indicators, with each contributing to the comprehensive evaluation of the teacher's engagement and effectiveness in facilitating the learning process. The detailed breakdown of scores and criteria serves as valuable feedback for the teacher, highlighting areas of strength and suggesting potential areas for improvement in subsequent teaching cycles. The teacher's commitment to creating an engaging learning environment is evident, and this assessment provides a constructive foundation for ongoing professional development. Overall, the student's learning engagement percentage in Cycle 1 for the first meeting can be seen in the table. Here are the results of the students' learning engagement percentage in Cycle 1 and the learning completion percentage in Cycle 1. The data shows that for the individual completion criteria, which is a score above 61, there are 20 students with a percentage of 64.52%. The results of the hangman game testing on vocabulary proficiency are as follows:

Table 3. Student Learning Engagement in Cycle 1

No	Criteria of Engagement	Percentage (%)
1	Very Active (SA)	41
2	Active (A)	29
3	Active Enough (CA)	19
4	Less Active (KA)	9

In Cycle 1, student learning engagement was assessed across various criteria, as depicted in Table 5. The table illustrates the distribution of engagement levels among students. The majority, constituting 41%, were classified as "Very Active," indicating a high level of engagement. Following closely behind were students classified as "Active," comprising 29% of the total. Many students fell under the "Active Enough" category, making up 19% of the cohort. However, a smaller proportion, accounting for 9%, were deemed "Less Active." This breakdown provides insight into students' varying levels of involvement and participation during learning.

Table 4. Learning Mastery in Cycle 1

No	Score	Number of students	Percentage (%)	Description
1	Less than 61	11	35.48%	Did not passed
2	More than 61	20	64.52%	Passed

Table 6 presents an analysis of learning mastery outcomes during Cycle 1. The data categories students based on their scores, delineating between those who passed and those who did not. Among the students assessed, 64.52% achieved scores surpassing the threshold of 61, signifying successful mastery of the material and consequently passing the evaluation. Conversely, 35.48% of students failed to attain scores meeting this criterion and were classified as not passing. This distinction sheds light on the distribution of learning achievements within the student cohort, highlighting both successes and areas for improvement.

Table 5. Vocabulary Skills of Students in Cycle 1

No	Score	Word Classification Skills		Word Meaning Identification Skills		Total (%)
		Total	Percentages	Total	Percentages	
1	Less than 61	7	22.58%	14	45.16%	35
2	More than 61	24	77.42%	17	54.84%	65

The table outlines the distribution of scores across two distinct aspects of vocabulary skills: word classification and word meaning identification. For students with scores below 61, 22.58% demonstrated proficiency in word classification skills, while 45.16% exhibited competency in word meaning identification. In contrast, a higher proportion of students scoring above 61

displayed proficiencies in both categories, with 77.42% showcasing strong word classification skills and 54.84% demonstrating adeptness in word meaning identification. These findings underscore students' varying levels of competence in different facets of vocabulary skills, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their language proficiency during the specified learning cycle. Overall, the students' vocabulary skills in cycle 1 are 65%.

Reflection Phase

Several important points were learned from the series of data collection phases in cycle 1. In the initial action, the game was played without a time limit. The teacher allowed guessing words until an unspecified time for the group playing. It caused the playing time to become longer and raised protests from students in other groups waiting for their turn to play. The difficulty level of the guessed words often became the subject of students' protests. Some students in the group complained when they received relatively long words to guess. However, there were also groups of students who were okay with the length or difficulty of the words, focusing more on the enjoyment of being involved in the game and their curiosity to find the answers. The improper seating arrangement of the students also became a weakness. However, thanks to the suggestions from the observer regarding this seating arrangement issue, it will be improved in cycle 2. The reflection results found answers to the weaknesses in cycle 1.

Regarding the game duration, in cycle 2, the teacher should inform the students of the playing time, which is 2 minutes and 30 seconds. Otherwise, like in cycle 1, the playing group could spend 5 minutes or more to guess one word. Concerning the difficulty level of words, in cycle 2, the teacher should provide words with the same level of difficulty for each group to guess. Lastly, regarding the seating arrangement, in cycle 2, the teacher should create a layout that facilitates student communication/interaction within their groups so that, unlike in cycle 1, students do not appear to have difficulties communicating/interacting due to a poor layout.

Cycle II

Action Planning Phase

The action planning phase in cycle II is designed to enhance both the teacher's and student's activities and improve learning outcomes. The following actions were taken: (a) creating a lesson plan with the Recount material for cycle 2, (b) preparing worksheets/handouts, (c) creating a teacher's activity observation sheet, (d) creating a student's activity observation sheet, (e) preparing learning evaluation instruments, (f) preparing teaching tools and materials, and (g) consulting with the advisor and scheduling research for the designated observer.

Action Implementation Phase

The first action was conducted on Monday, March 21st, 2023, from 8.30 to 10:00 AM. The implementation location and subjects were the same as in cycle 1. The second action was conducted on Wednesday, March 23rd, 2023, from 8.30 to 10:00 AM. In the second action, the teacher evaluated the learning process by giving a vocabulary test to the students. The list of vocabulary test questions is attached in the research instrument appendix. The research instrument for cycle 2 consists of 42 questions on noun and verb word classification and ten questions on word meanings, resulting in 52 vocabulary test questions in cycle 2. The number of test items was increased from 30 in cycle 1 to observe the students' vocabulary skills. The students were also asked to complete a questionnaire to conclude their learning outcomes. The students' responses in the questionnaire represent their feedback on implementing the hangman game. The first observers in cycle 2 were the same as in cycle 1, namely my collaborator, Susanty Mekar, S.Pd. The details of the second action in cycle two were documented in the teacher's and students' activity observation sheets.

Observation and Evaluation Phase

In this phase, observations were made during the learning process by observing the students' and teacher's activities using observation sheets. Based on the data, the quality of teacher's activities reached 74%. The number of indicators for teacher's activity implementation was 18, less than the number of indicators in cycle 1, which was 20. Because the hangman game's implementation has become familiar to students and teachers, indicators related to introducing the method or technical instructions for the hangman game were eliminated from the list. In addition, input and suggestions from the observer and the reflection on cycle one was used as indicators, such as setting a time limit for playing and utilizing handouts.

Table 6. Student Learning Engagement in Cycle 2

No	Criteria of Engagement	Percentage (%)
1	Very Active (SA)	55
2	Active (A)	44
3	Active Enough (CA)	7
4	Less Active (KA)	0

The data above proves that students have been actively engaged in every aspect of learning. However, teacher control is still needed. The teacher still plays a role in every aspect and process of learning. The increased level of student engagement is an indication of successful learning. The following table

shows the overall comparison of student's learning outcomes between cycles 1 and 2.

Table 7: Comparison of Student Learning Outcomes between Cycle 1 and 2

No	Score	Cycle 1		Cycle 2	
		Total	Percentages	Total	Percentages
1	Less than 61	11	35.48%	0	0%
2	More than 61	20	64.52%	31	100%

The data above proves that students have been actively engaged in every aspect of learning. However, teacher control is still needed. The teacher still plays a role in every aspect and process of learning. The increased level of student engagement is an indication of successful learning. In Cycle 2, 70% of students scored above 61 in their ability to classify words. The ability to determine word meanings reached 70%. Overall, students' vocabulary skills improved by 5% from Cycle 1. The comparison of the percentage of students' vocabulary skills can be seen in the following table.

Table 8: Comparison of Student Vocabulary Skills Percentage

No	Score	Cycle	
		I	II
1	Less than 61	35%	22.58%
2	More than 61	65%	77.42%

The success of a learning model can be determined by the improvement in students' vocabulary skills. Based on the data above, students' vocabulary skills reached 77.42% in Cycle 2, 12.42% higher than in Cycle 1. This data demonstrates that the achievement of students' vocabulary skills in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 is quite significant.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, the following conclusions can be drawn. (1) The hangman game method used in this study improved English vocabulary skills by 5%. (2) The quality of teachers' engagement increased by 12%. (3) The percentage of student engagement in the "very active" category increased by 14%, and for the "active" category, it increased by 15%. Although these percentages are not yet optimal, they reflect the actual conditions in this research. The researcher has several recommendations for teaching vocabulary to students to improve vocabulary skills. These include: (1) when introducing new vocabulary, teachers should also teach the meaning, word class, and pronunciation of the words. (2) The meaning of words in specific contexts is more important. (3) Students need diverse and regular practice to learn new vocabulary. The hangman method can be used to improve students' vocabulary skills, along with other relevant methods.

For future research, the researcher suggests conducting a pre- and post-design to test or prove the absolute improvement of the hangman method in enhancing vocabulary skills. This design can compare the pure mean scores of students' vocabulary mastery in conventional learning with the scores after using the hangman game as the final assessment.

THANKS TO

I would like to express my thanks to every writing partner who has provided constructive and inspiring input and feedback on this article. Their insights and knowledge were invaluable in shaping this piece of writing. We also express our gratitude for the support we receive from our institution.

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