

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CROSSWORD IN TEACHING VOCABULARY AT 9TH GRADES OF AL-ISMAILIYAH OMBUL HIGH SCHOOL SAMPANG

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Key words:

Vocabularies,

Crossword, Game

Article Type:

Research

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the implementation of crossword puzzle media in teaching English vocabulary to ninth-grade students at SMP Al Ismailiyah Ombul Tambelangan. Vocabulary mastery is an essential aspect of language learning, as it forms the foundation for reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. However, vocabulary acquisition remains a challenge for many junior high school students due to limited vocabulary knowledge, low motivation, and difficulties in remembering new words. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with six ninth-grade students and one English teacher as the subjects. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive overview. The findings indicate that the use of crossword puzzles helps students understand, retain, and use vocabulary more effectively through enjoyable, creative, and interactive learning activities. In addition, students demonstrated high enthusiasm and active participation throughout the learning process. The teacher also played an important role by providing initial guidance, explaining instructions, and motivating the students. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the use of crossword puzzles is an effective strategy to improve vocabulary mastery while creating an active, innovative, and enjoyable learning environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The vocabulary skill is important in english communication because through crossword can improve vocabulary in addition, vocabulary can boost student opportunity not only in academic context but also in their social life (richards & rodgers, 2014). as an example, a teacher with good , vocabulary skill will be able to encourage motivate students well because the teacher becomes the model of the skill. similarly, students with proficient , vocabulary skill will be able to perform well and very likely improve their confident in learning english. thus, vocabulary is very important for the students especially in junior high school.

However, despite the important of , vocabulary skill for the students, very few of them can perform well in , vocabulary skill. as an example, clarence ng et al (2024) found the decline of vocabulary skill among students.

There are some reasons why the skill is become shared challenge among the students such as minimum exposure of english in their daily life, the assumption that english is difficult, monotonous teaching methodology, anxiety and education access. on the other hand, teachers also face their own challenge in teaching english such as curriculum adaptation, material to use, teacher quality disparity, lack of methodology understanding as well as access and facility. akdemir et al (2012) believes that

Teaching english require the teacher with comprehensive understanding of various components in teaching. thus, teaching english demands teacher to be well prepared and many to offer in their disposal. Similarly, Hubackova (2021) claims that materials play important role in the success of teaching learning process. In addition, Ukumo & Berlie (2024) believes that literacy skill is the foundation for different skills in English language teaching. In short, teaching vocabulary need to be as joyful/enjoyable/ feasible as possible to ease the burden of studnets.

In 9th Grade of An Naqsyabandiyah Ombul Junior High School Sampang the teacher uses crossword method to teach vocabulary Based on the pre-research observation, the researcher found that student were little motivated in participating in classroom activity. In some case the students cannot perform specific task that has been stated in the objective of the class. Thus, this research focuses on (judul) The implementation of crossword in teaching vocabulary at 9th grade of SMP al ismailiyah ombul junior high school SAMPANG.

Vocabulary mastery is an important aspect of language learning because vocabulary provides the foundation for communication. Without having an adequate number of words, learners will find it difficult to understand listening texts, read passages, express ideas in speaking, and construct sentences in writing. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge covers not only the meaning of words but also their spelling, pronunciation, collocation, and grammatical usage. This shows that vocabulary is not simply a list of words to memorize, but a core element that supports all language skills.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative design to gain an indepth understanding of how crossword puzzles are implemented in teaching English vocabulary. The qualitative approach is chosen because it can capture the contextual and interactive aspects of the learning process comprehensively.

The subjects of the study are the teacher and ninthgrade students at Al-Ismailiyah Ombul Senior High School, Sampang. The research was conducted over four meetings involving 8 active students. Data were collected through documentation, observation, and interviews. Documentation was obtained from the teacher's Lesson Plan (RPP) in teaching vocabulary using crossword puzzles. Observation was conducted directly during the learning process using a checklist based on vocabulary teaching theories. Interviews were held to explore the teacher's perspective on the implementation of crossword puzzles in the vocabulary teaching process. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively to provide an overview of the effectiveness and application of this method in the classroom.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of crossword puzzles as a vocabulary learning strategy had a positive impact on students' vocabulary mastery. Classroom

observations showed that students were more actively involved during learning activities compared to conventional vocabulary instruction. Students were able to identify word meanings, spell vocabulary items correctly, and apply the learned words in short sentences after completing the crossword tasks.

Interview data further supported these findings. One student stated:

“Learning vocabulary with crossword puzzles is fun because we can think and guess the words together. I remember the words more easily than just memorizing them.”

Another student explained that crossword puzzles helped them recall vocabulary during assessments:

“When I saw the questions in the test, I remembered the crossword we did in class, so it was easier to answer.”

The teacher also highlighted the improvement in students’ engagement and vocabulary retention:

“Students who were usually passive became more active. They asked questions, discussed answers with their friends, and showed better understanding of vocabulary after using crossword puzzles.”

Overall, the findings suggest that crossword puzzles not only enhanced students’ vocabulary comprehension but also improved their motivation and participation in the learning process.

The findings of this study demonstrate that crossword puzzles are an effective instructional tool for improving students’ vocabulary mastery. The increased student engagement observed during the learning process supports the idea that vocabulary learning becomes more meaningful when students are involved in enjoyable and interactive activities. Crossword puzzles encourage students to actively recall word meanings, spelling, and contextual usage, which aligns with cognitive theories of vocabulary acquisition that emphasize active processing and retrieval practice.

The increased student engagement observed during the learning process supports the view that vocabulary learning becomes more meaningful when students are involved in enjoyable and interactive activities rather than passive memorization (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006). Crossword puzzles require learners to actively recall word meanings, spelling, and contextual usage, a process that is central to effective vocabulary acquisition. According to cognitive theories of learning, active processing and retrieval practice strengthen memory consolidation and promote long-term retention of lexical items (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2008).

From a cognitive perspective, repeated retrieval of lexical items through crossword clues strengthens memory traces and facilitates deeper processing. Rather than passively receiving word lists, students must analyze clues, activate prior knowledge, and evaluate possible answers, which promotes higher levels of cognitive engagement. This process supports durable vocabulary learning because students repeatedly encounter words in problem-solving contexts that require attention to both form and meaning.

Furthermore, crossword puzzles promote deeper cognitive involvement because learners must interpret clues, activate prior knowledge, and evaluate possible lexical choices before arriving at the correct answer. This problem-solving element encourages elaborative processing, which has been shown to enhance vocabulary retention more effectively than rote repetition. By repeatedly retrieving vocabulary items in varied contexts provided by the clues, students develop stronger form–meaning connections and a more robust mental lexicon. As a result, crossword puzzles function not only as a motivational tool but also as a cognitively principled strategy that supports durable vocabulary learning (Schmitt, 2008). From a cognitive perspective, repeated retrieval of lexical items through crossword clues strengthens memory traces and facilitates deeper processing. Rather than passively receiving word lists, students must analyze clues, activate prior knowledge, and evaluate possible answers, which promotes higher levels of cognitive engagement. This process supports durable vocabulary learning because students repeatedly encounter words in problem-solving contexts that require attention to both form and meaning.

The interview data reveal that students perceived crossword puzzles as an enjoyable learning activity that reduced anxiety and boredom. This affective dimension is particularly important in vocabulary learning, as anxiety and low motivation often hinder students' willingness to engage with new lexical items. By transforming vocabulary practice into a game-like activity, crossword puzzles lower students' affective barriers and encourage risk-taking in learning, such as guessing word meanings and discussing answers with peers. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that game-based learning activities can enhance students' motivation and improve learning outcomes. When students described remembering vocabulary by recalling crossword activities, it indicates that crossword puzzles support long-term retention by connecting learning with positive emotional experiences.

Moreover, the teacher's role was crucial in maximizing the effectiveness of crossword puzzles. Effective implementation required the teacher to carefully select vocabulary items, design clear and meaningful clues, and ensure that the difficulty level matched students' proficiency. Through guided support and timely feedback, the teacher helped students make connections between the crossword activity and the learning objectives, ensuring that the puzzle functioned as a pedagogical tool rather than merely an entertaining task. The teacher provided clear instructions, modeled examples, and guided students during the activity. This scaffolding helped students focus on learning objectives rather than merely completing the puzzle. The teacher's motivation and encouragement also fostered a supportive learning environment, allowing students to collaborate and share ideas.

The findings confirm that crossword puzzles support vocabulary learning by integrating form, meaning, and use. When students decode clues, they focus on semantic aspects of words; when they fill in the grid, they attend to spelling and word form; and when they discuss answers, they negotiate meaning and usage. This integration is essential for comprehensive vocabulary mastery, as knowing a word involves more than recognizing its definition. Therefore, crossword puzzles provide a structured yet flexible learning activity that supports holistic vocabulary development. Students were required to understand clues, select appropriate words, and spell them correctly, which strengthened their vocabulary knowledge. This focused use of crossword puzzles directly contributed to vocabulary improvement without diverting attention to unrelated language skills.

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The teacher provided clear instructions, modeled examples, and guided students during the activity, which reflects the importance of pedagogical scaffolding in vocabulary instruction (Nation, 2013). Such guidance ensured that students understood not only how to complete the crossword but also why specific vocabulary items were relevant to the learning objectives. By directing students' attention to word meanings, spelling patterns, and appropriate usage, the teacher prevented the activity from becoming a purely mechanical task.

In addition, the teacher's motivational support played a significant role in sustaining students' engagement throughout the activity. Encouragement and positive feedback created a low-anxiety learning environment, which is essential for effective vocabulary acquisition, particularly for learners who may lack confidence in using new words (Schmitt, 2008). The supportive classroom atmosphere also promoted collaboration, as students felt comfortable sharing ideas, negotiating answers, and learning from peers. This interaction further reinforced vocabulary learning by allowing students to verbalize and refine their understanding of lexical items, thereby strengthening both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006). Effective implementation required the teacher to carefully select vocabulary items, design clear and meaningful clues, and ensure that the difficulty level matched students' proficiency. Through guided support and timely feedback, the teacher helped students make connections between the crossword activity and the learning objectives, ensuring that the puzzle functioned as a pedagogical tool rather than merely an entertaining task. The teacher provided clear instructions, modeled examples, and guided students during the activity. This scaffolding helped students focus on learning objectives rather than merely completing the puzzle. The teacher's motivation and encouragement also fostered a supportive learning environment, allowing students to collaborate and share ideas.

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CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of crossword puzzles is an effective strategy for improving students' vocabulary mastery. Crossword puzzles create an active, innovative, and enjoyable learning environment that encourages students to participate actively and retain vocabulary more effectively. Interview data confirmed that students found crossword puzzles engaging and helpful for remembering vocabulary, while the teacher observed increased motivation and participation.

Therefore, crossword puzzles can be recommended as an alternative vocabulary teaching strategy, particularly in contexts where students experience difficulty memorizing vocabulary through traditional methods. Teachers are encouraged to integrate crossword puzzles into vocabulary instruction with appropriate guidance and clear learning objectives to maximize their effectiveness..

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