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# ENHANCING ENGLISH VOCABULARY MASTERY THROUGH GAME-BASED APPROACHES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat dampak pembelajaran berbasis permainan, khususnya menggunakan Simon Says dan Flashcards, terhadap peningkatan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris pada siswa sekolah dasar. Kemampuan berbahasa Inggris, terutama penguasaan kosakata, sangat penting bagi siswa untuk dapat memahami, berbicara, membaca, dan menulis dalam bahasa Inggris. Namun, banyak siswa sekolah dasar mengalami kesulitan dalam menguasai kosakata, yang menyebabkan rendahnya motivasi dan hasil belajar. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di SDN 12 Kendari dengan melibatkan 26 siswa kelas V. Desain penelitian yang digunakan adalah pra-eksperimental dengan model *pre-test* dan *post-test* selama lima kali pertemuan, menggunakan tema pembelajaran "anggota tubuh" dan "benda di kelas" melalui kegiatan *Simon Says* dan *Flashcards*. Hasil *pre-test* menunjukkan rata-rata 23,65, sedangkan *post-test* meningkat signifikan menjadi 72,58. Uji Wilcoxon Signed Ranks menghasilkan nilai signifikansi 0,001 (< 0,05), yang menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis permainan tidak hanya efektif meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata, tetapi juga memberikan kontribusi bagi guru dalam menciptakan suasana belajar yang menyenangkan dan kolaboratif. Pendekatan ini dapat diterapkan secara luas untuk meningkatkan motivasi dan keterampilan berbahasa Inggris siswa sekolah dasar.
**Keywords:** *Vocabulary, Game-Based Approach, Elementary School Students.*

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of game-based learning, specifically through the use of Simon Says and Flashcards, on improving English vocabulary mastery among elementary school students. Vocabulary mastery is a crucial component of English proficiency that supports students' ability to understand, speak, read, and write effectively. However, many elementary school students struggle to acquire sufficient vocabulary, leading to low motivation and learning outcomes. This research was conducted at SDN 12 Kendari, involving 26 fifth-grade students. A pre-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test model was implemented over five sessions, focusing on the themes "Body Parts" and "Things in the Classroom" through Simon Says and Flashcards activities. The pre-test average score was 23.65, which significantly increased to 72.58 in the post-test. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test showed a significance value of 0.001 (< 0.05), indicating a statistically significant improvement. These findings demonstrate that game-based learning not only enhances students' vocabulary mastery but also provides practical insights for teachers in designing engaging and collaborative classroom activities. This approach can be effectively applied to foster motivation and improve English language skills among elementary school students.
**Keywords:** *Vocabulary, Game-Based Approach, Elementary School Students.*

## INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most essential competencies in primary education as it serves as a foundation for global communication. As an international language (*lingua franca*), English facilitates intercultural interaction, broadens access to knowledge and technology, and

opens opportunities in the globalized era. Research by Rif'atullah and Rizaldy Putra (2024) found that English has transformed into a lingua franca that bridges communication gaps not only internationally but also within local contexts. It allows people from diverse backgrounds to share ideas, knowledge, and cultural experiences. The statement underlines how English serves both as a medium for global connection and as a force shaping local learning practices, especially in literacy education. Therefore, mastering English offers broad access to information, technology, and cross-cultural experiences. At the elementary level, English learning generally emphasizes the development of four basic language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing—which form the basis of communicative competence. Listening helps students understand spoken messages, speaking enables them to express ideas, reading aids comprehension of written texts, and writing allows them to communicate thoughts effectively. This aligns with the concept of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, which emphasizes balanced skill development in early education (Muslih, 2021). Among these skills, vocabulary mastery is crucial as it serves as the core of language comprehension and production. Without adequate vocabulary, students struggle to understand input and express ideas clearly. Studies have shown a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and overall English proficiency students with broader vocabulary tend to communicate more fluently (Rafique et al., 2023).

Many elementary school students, however, still face difficulties in recalling and using English vocabulary accurately, which affects their ability to communicate effectively. A qualitative study by Ryan et al. (2024) found that students often struggle to translate between English and their native language, mispronounce new words, misspell, or easily forget vocabulary after learning it. Similarly, Alqahtani (2015) emphasizes that limited vocabulary remains one of the biggest challenges in learning English, as it prevents learners from conveying ideas and understanding messages effectively. These difficulties are often intensified by conventional learning methods that rely heavily on memorization and repetitive drills, which cause boredom and disengagement. Although such techniques may help students remember words temporarily, they contribute little to long-term understanding. Conversely, interactive and multimedia-based learning can significantly improve retention and deepen comprehension compared to traditional text-based approaches (Alhazmi, 2024).

Motivated by these challenges, the researcher sought to improve English learning, particularly vocabulary acquisition, among elementary school students. Preliminary observations at SDN 12 Kendari revealed that English is no longer taught as a formal subject due to the lack of qualified English teachers. A short vocabulary test showed that only a few students could answer correctly, indicating limited knowledge of basic English words. Consequently, this study was conducted with fifth-grade students to address problems such as low retention, reliance on rote methods, and lack of engaging media. These factors have contributed to suboptimal learning outcomes students may perform adequately on short-term tasks but lack deep and functional vocabulary knowledge needed for fluent speaking, reading comprehension, and expressive writing.

In response, game-based learning has emerged as a promising method that enables students to learn through enjoyable and meaningful experiences, fostering motivation and engagement. Previous studies show that this approach improves focus and memory retention in English learning. Dalimunthe et al. (2024) revealed that the application of game-based learning enhances students' ability to comprehend and remember vocabulary more efficiently. One simple yet effective example is *Simon Says*, where students listen to instructions and perform corresponding movements. This activity corresponds to the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach, which integrates auditory input with physical movement in the learning process.

Research by Mariyam and Musfiroh (2019) confirmed that TPR-based games like *Simon Says* enhanced vocabulary retention and made lessons more enjoyable. Similarly, *Flashcards* have proven to be an effective visual tool that supports recognition and recall through the use of colors, images, and shapes. Studies in Indonesia have shown that flashcards improve both vocabulary mastery and student motivation Paldy et al. (2025), making learning more interactive and suited for young learners.

Several studies also support the effectiveness of Simon Says and Flashcards in improving students' English proficiency. Putri et al. (2024) reported that flashcards improved word recall and vocabulary test scores, while Azahra et al. (2024) found that flashcard-based learning enhanced both motivation and mastery. Likewise, Astuti Murni and Zuhriyah (2023) observed that Simon Says activities improved listening comprehension and vocabulary understanding. However, research combining these two methods, especially in the context of elementary English learning, remains scarce. Most previous studies examined only one method, without exploring how visual and physical activities might complement each other. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by integrating Simon Says and Flashcards in a single game-based learning model. This combination represents an innovative approach designed to match young learners' characteristics, improve vocabulary mastery, and create an engaging, student-centered classroom environment.

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a pre-experimental method involving one group that was tested before and after the treatment. The design was chosen to examine the effectiveness of game-based learning in enhancing students' mastery of English vocabulary. The participants consisted of 26 fifth-grade students from SDN 12 Kendari, comprising both male and female learners with diverse levels of English proficiency. The study focused on two thematic areas, *Body Parts* and *Things in the Classroom*, which were chosen based on their relevance to the students' daily experiences and curriculum. The research instruments included a pre-test and a post-test, each consisting of 15 multiple-choice questions designed to measure students' understanding of word meanings and spelling accuracy. The tests were developed and validated by an English expert to ensure clarity and content validity, and each correct answer was scored as one point, later converted to a scale of 0–100.

Data collection was carried out through three consecutive stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. The pre-test was administered to identify students' initial vocabulary mastery before the intervention. The treatment was conducted over five sessions, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, during which students learned vocabulary through *Simon Says* and *Flashcards*. The *Simon Says* activity emphasized auditory and kinesthetic engagement, requiring students to perform physical actions in response to spoken English commands, while *Flashcards* provided visual stimuli that helped students recognize, pronounce, and recall English words effectively. These two techniques were applied alternately to sustain motivation and reinforce word retention. After the final session, a post-test with the same number and format of questions as the pre-test was given to measure the improvement in vocabulary mastery. Data analysis was carried out using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test in SPSS to evaluate whether the observed difference between pre-test and post-test scores was statistically meaningful. This non-parametric test was selected because the data distribution did not meet the assumption of normality. All research procedures were conducted under similar classroom conditions to maintain consistency and ensure that any observed improvement resulted from the game-based learning treatment.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Results

The following section presents a description of the data analyzed in this study. The pre-test was administered to measure students' baseline level of vocabulary mastery before the implementation of the treatment. This analysis aims to determine the baseline performance and the overall distribution of scores among the participants. The descriptive statistics, comprising measures such as the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, range, minimum, and maximum, were calculated to summarize students' baseline performance before the intervention. The results of this descriptive analysis are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Pre-test Descriptive Analysis**

| Statistic | Value |
|---|---|
| N (Valid) | 26 |
| N (Missing) | 0 |
| Mean | 23.65 |
| Median | 20.00 |
| Mode | 13[a] |
| Standard Deviation | 13.994 |
| Range | 47 |
| Minimum | 0 |
| Maximum | 47 |

[a] *Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.*

From the Table 1, it shows the descriptive results of the pre-test. All 26 students completed the test with no missing data. The mean score of 23.65, along with a median of 20.00 and a mode of 13, indicates that students' vocabulary mastery was generally low before the treatment. The standard deviation of 13.994 and the wide score range (0–47) show that students' initial vocabulary abilities varied greatly. Some students had very limited vocabulary knowledge, while others achieved higher scores.

To identify the students' vocabulary mastery levels before the treatment, a range score was created using the pre-test results. The difference between the highest and lowest scores was divided into four equal parts to form the categories of Beginner, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, and Advanced. This classification helps to describe the students' initial vocabulary ability more clearly before the learning treatment was applied.

$$\text{Range score} = \frac{\text{Max. Score} - \text{Min. Score}}{\text{Category}}$$

$$\text{Range score} = \frac{47 - 0}{4} = 11{,}75$$

After calculating the range score, the researcher classified the students' vocabulary mastery levels based on the obtained intervals. This categorization was intended to describe

students' initial English proficiency more clearly and to show how their scores were distributed across different ability levels. The classification includes four categories Beginner, Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, and Advanced which represent the progression of vocabulary mastery before the treatment. The complete classification of score ranges is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Test Range Score**

| Test Range Score | |
|---|---|
| Range Score | Category |
| 0 - 25 | Beginner |
| 26 - 50 | Pre-Intermediate |
| 51 - 75 | Intermediate |
| 76 - 100 | Advanced |

From the table above, it can be concluded that the pre-test scores range from 0 to 47, giving a total range of 47. Dividing this by four produces an interval of 11.75, which is used to classify students' vocabulary mastery into four categories: Beginner (0–25), Pre-Intermediate (26–50), Intermediate (51–75), and Advanced (76–100). Since the highest score is 47, most students fall into the Beginner or Pre-Intermediate levels, indicating generally low vocabulary mastery before the treatment.

After the instructional treatment, post-test data were obtained to assess students' level of vocabulary mastery as a result of the intervention. This analysis aims to evaluate the improvement in students' performance and to observe the overall distribution of scores after the students were taught English through the Simon Says and Flashcard games. The descriptive statistics, comprising the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, range, minimum, and maximum values, were analyzed to provide a detailed picture of students' achievement following the intervention. The results of this descriptive analysis are presented in table 3 below.

**Table 3. Post-test Descriptive Analysis**

| Statistic | Value |
|---|---|
| N (Valid) | 26 |
| N (Missing) | 0 |
| Mean | 72.58 |
| Median | 73.00 |
| Mode | 67[a] |
| Standard Deviation | 12.615 |
| Range | 40 |
| Minimum | 53 |
| Maximum | 93 |

[a] *Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.*

From the table 3 above, the post-test descriptive analysis shows a clear improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after being taught English through the Simon Says and Flashcard games. As presented in table 3, the mean score increased to 72.58, indicating that, on average, students achieved higher performance compared to the pre-test. The median score of 73 suggests that at least half of the students scored above this value, reflecting a generally strong

level of achievement. The mode score of 67 shows the most frequently obtained score among the participants. The standard deviation of 12.615 indicates moderate variability in students' scores, suggesting that while most students performed well, a few showed higher or lower results than the group average. The range of 40, with a minimum score of 53 and a maximum score of 93, further confirms that all students demonstrated a substantial level of vocabulary mastery after the treatment.

To further determine whether the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the treatment was statistically significant, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was conducted. This non-parametric test was chosen because the data did not meet the assumption of normality. The test compared the students' pre-test and post-test scores to identify any significant difference in their performance. The results of this statistical analysis are presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4. Post-test Range Score**

| Test | Z | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|
| Post-Test – Pre-Test | -4.468[b] | < 0.001 |

[a] *Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test*
[b] *Based on negative ranks.*

Table 4 presents the outcome of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, showing a Z score of -4.468 and an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of less than 0.001. Sig. (2-tailed) value of < 0.001. This statistical finding shows a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students. Since the significance value is lower than 0.05 (0.001 < 0.05), it can be concluded that the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the treatment is statistically significant. A negative Z score implies that most students obtained higher results in the post-test compared to the pre-test, reflecting enhanced performance after engaging in the Simon Says and Flashcard games. This suggests that the treatment had a positive and meaningful effect on students' English vocabulary mastery.

In summary, the Wilcoxon test results confirmed a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the treatment. This finding indicates that the use of Simon Says and Flashcard games had a positive impact on learning outcomes. The statistical evidence clearly supports the effectiveness of game-based learning in improving vocabulary achievement. Therefore, this approach can be considered a practical and engaging method for teaching English to elementary students.

## Discussion

This study analyzed the pre-test and post-test scores of students to evaluate the effectiveness of using Simon Says and Flashcard games in enhancing English vocabulary mastery among elementary school students. Descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS showed a substantial improvement in students' performance after the treatment. The pre-test results revealed a mean score of 23.65, with scores ranging from 0 to 47 and a standard deviation of 13.994, indicating a wide variation in the students' initial vocabulary proficiency. Based on the scoring range, this average places students in the "Beginner" category, suggesting that most learners initially had a very basic level of English vocabulary knowledge.

After the treatment, in which students learned vocabulary through the Simon Says and Flashcard games, the post-test results showed a marked improvement. The mean score increased to 72.58, with scores ranging from 53 to 93, and the median rose to 73.00. The slightly lower standard deviation of 12.615 indicated reduced variability and more consistent performance among students. According to the scoring range, the average post-test score placed

the students in the "Intermediate" category (51–75), showing that they had progressed from beginner to intermediate proficiency. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test further confirmed that all 26 participants achieved higher post-test scores than pre-test scores, yielding a *Z* value of -4.468 and an *Asymp. Sig.* (2-tailed) < 0.001. This result indicates that the improvement was statistically significant and that the hypothesis - that students' vocabulary mastery would improve after learning through games - was accepted.

The findings provide strong evidence that game-based learning (GBL), particularly through Simon Says and Flashcards, is highly effective for teaching English vocabulary to young learners (Dalimunthe et al., 2024**)**. The improvement can be explained by the multimodal and interactive nature of these games, which combine auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning modes to enhance word retention and engagement. In Simon Says, learners respond physically to spoken instructions, stimulating both cognitive and motor processes that strengthen memory associations. Flashcards, on the other hand, employ visual-verbal pairing that promotes recognition and recall through dual coding and spaced repetition.

Moreover, the motivational and affective dimensions of game-based learning also play a crucial role. According to Alotaibi (2024), game-based environments can lower students' affective filters, making them feel more relaxed and willing to participate. For young learners, the sense of enjoyment and engagement is essential in maintaining focus and facilitating deeper learning. The present study's findings are consistent with Humairoh et al. (2023), who found that the use of the Simon Says game effectively improved students' vocabulary mastery. Like Nasution (2022) also found that the Simon Says creates a more active, enjoyable, and participatory classroom atmosphere. Students find it easier to understand English instructions and remain more focused during the learning process. Similarly, Fitriyani and Nulanda (2017) reported that Flashcards significantly enhanced English vocabulary acquisition among elementary school students. Also, Nurasida et al. (2023) who had conducted a study using Flashcards showed that it had been proven effective in enhancing English vocabulary mastery even at the secondary school level. Collectively, these results confirm that combining movement-based (Simon Says) and visual-based (Flashcards) activities creates a balanced, multisensory learning environment that supports vocabulary retention, motivation, and active engagement.

From a pedagogical perspective, the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery also underscores the centrality of vocabulary as the foundation for other language skills, including reading, speaking, and writing. The use of games encourages repetition and contextualized usage, making vocabulary learning both effective and enjoyable. The integration of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic channels allows students with diverse learning styles to benefit from the process, which also explains the reduced variation in post-test scores. Consistent with this, Vnucko and Klimova (2023) emphasize that game-based learning is a promising approach for primary education, as it not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters essential twenty-first-century skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. In the context of primary education in Indonesia, these results emphasize the importance of innovating English teaching strategies that are participatory and contextual in nature. Approaches such as Simon Says and Flashcards not only enhance students' learning outcomes but also foster their interest and motivation to learn a foreign language from an early age. It is like what Fauzi (2022) has found that even though children acquire languages more quickly than adults, traditional teaching methods are not the most effective for them. Young learners tend to grasp a new language more successfully when engaging in enjoyable and playful activities, as such approaches make the learning process feel natural and effortless, allowing them to learn without realizing it.

However, despite these promising outcomes, the study acknowledges several limitations. The relatively small sample size (N = 26) and the absence of a randomized control group restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study only measured short-term improvements, without examining long-term vocabulary retention. Future research should employ larger samples, control groups, and longitudinal designs to explore the sustainability of these gains and to determine whether game-based vocabulary learning also enhances other linguistic competencies such as grammar and reading comprehension. As Plass et al., (2015) state that most research on game-based learning focuses on short-term learning improvements; however, long-term studies are needed to determine if these effects remain consistent over time. Furthermore, replication studies are recommended to evaluate how different durations, frequencies, or combinations of games might yield optimal results.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical support for the effectiveness of integrating Simon Says and Flashcards in teaching English vocabulary to elementary school students, especially in SDN 12 Kendari. The statistically significant improvement from pre-test to post-test scores demonstrates that multimodal, interactive, and affectively supportive learning environments can substantially enhance vocabulary mastery. Although further study is needed to strengthen generalizability and long-term validity, this study provides a significant contribution to the development of more effective, communicative, and learner-centered English teaching methods, which are better aligned with the characteristics and learning needs of elementary school students in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that incorporating *Simon Says* and *Flashcards* in English learning can significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery. The observed increase in post-test performance suggests that game-based learning provides both cognitive stimulation and emotional engagement, helping students to recall and use new vocabulary more effectively. Through the combination of physical activity and visual learning, this method supports different learner preferences and enhances classroom participation. Overall, the study successfully achieves its goal of addressing low vocabulary proficiency and limited learning motivation among elementary school students through an active, student-centered learning approach.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study reinforces the importance of game-based learning as a comprehensive framework for teaching English to young learners. The findings confirm that multisensory interaction—through movement, visuals, and repetition—creates a meaningful learning experience that promotes retention and enjoyment. Practically, this approach offers teachers an adaptable model that can be applied in various educational settings, even with limited instructional resources. Future investigations are encouraged to integrate digital learning tools, involve larger participant groups, and conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact and broader applicability of game-based vocabulary learning.

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