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GAMIFIED VOCABULARY LEARNING THROUGH GIMKIT: EVIDENCE FROM AN INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary retention is a persistent challenge for beginner EFL learners. This classroom action research investigated the effectiveness of Gimkit, a digital game-based learning tool, in improving vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade students at UPTD SMPN 2 Kisaran. The study was conducted over two action-research cycles based on the Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) model and involved 32 students from class VII-9 who had low initial vocabulary scores. Data were gathered through vocabulary tests and student interviews. The results demonstrated a notable improvement in mastery: only 18.75% of students passed the minimum criterion in the pre-test, which increased to 46.87% in Cycle 1 and 90.6% in Cycle 2. The integration of visual aids and the use of Gimkit's rematch feature in Cycle 2 enhanced student engagement and memory retention. Interviews indicated that students found the learning process more enjoyable and motivating. Nonetheless, some learners continued to experience difficulties in vocabulary retention due to external factors such as health issues and personal challenges. These findings highlight the potential of Gimkit as an effective and engaging digital tool to support vocabulary acquisition in EFL classrooms, particularly at the beginner level.

Keyword : *Gimkit, vocabulary, learning media*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of second language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge is essential for both comprehension and production. Without a sufficient vocabulary base, students may struggle to understand others and to express their thoughts effectively. At the junior high school level, especially in the seventh grade, students are typically at the early stages of formal English language learning. Therefore, establishing a strong vocabulary foundation is crucial for supporting their overall language development. As Yu (2023) emphasized, increased vocabulary breadth enables learners to access broader

communication opportunities and learning experiences. This is supported by Alqahtani (2015), who stated that vocabulary is central to language learning and communication competence. Moreover, Zou et al (2022) noted that vocabulary learning remains a significant challenge for EFL learners, and technological interventions have shown promise in facilitating better vocabulary retention and learner motivation. Additionally, García-Sánchez and Luján-Mora (2021) emphasized that insufficient vocabulary knowledge can hinder learner autonomy and academic success, underscoring the need for effective vocabulary instruction strategies in early stages of language education.

Research indicates that traditional vocabulary teaching strategies, such as rote memorization and isolated word lists are often inadequate for promoting long-term retention, particularly among early adolescents (Lin & Lin, 2019; Webb & Nation, 2017). Preliminary test from VII-9 at UPTD SMPN 2 Kisaran revealed that over 80% of students failed to meet the minimum passing score of 70 in baseline vocabulary assessments. This data highlights the inadequacy of traditional methods, especially considering the cognitive and motivational needs of Grade VII students. These learners are still developing linguistic and cognitive skills, which requires instructional approaches that are more interactive, engaging, and tailored to diverse learning styles (Sabarrudin & Silvianetri, 2022).

In response to these challenges, the integration of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) has emerged as an effective alternative. Digital tools and interactive media are widely recognized for their ability to create more dynamic, personalized, and stimulating learning environments (Zou et al., 2022). Game-based learning, a subset of TELL, uses game mechanics such as points, competition, and feedback to increase motivation and engagement (García-Sánchez & Luján-Mora, 2021). According to Mayer (2020), multimedia learning that incorporates visual, auditory, and interactive elements aligns with cognitive learning principles and can reduce extraneous load while enhancing retention. Furthermore, research by Tran (2021) demonstrated that spaced repetition and instant feedback, common features of gamified tools, improve vocabulary recall and long-term retention. Recent studies by Al-Aosail et al. (2024) and Ahmed et al. (2022) further confirm that digital game-based environments reduce foreign language anxiety while boosting learners' motivation, engagement, and vocabulary development. These low-anxiety, immersive settings encourage learners to actively use and experiment with language in meaningful contexts, contributing to more effective and enduring vocabulary acquisition.

Among various platforms used in game-based learning, such as *Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Blooket, Gimkit* stands out for its adaptive learning model, repetition cycles, and gamification elements. *Gimkit* allows learners to answer customized question sets repeatedly while earning in-game rewards, which fosters both engagement and memory retention. Amelia (2024) found that the use of *Gimkit* significantly increased students' motivation and interest during English lessons. Sharmin and Chow (2023) further reported that learners using *Gimkit* performed better on retention tests compared to those taught using conventional methods. Similarly, Avsar et al. (2023) highlighted the tool's effectiveness in reinforcing learning content and sustaining attention in higher education settings.

Despite these promising results, limited empirical studies have examined the implementation of *Gimkit* in the Indonesian EFL context, particularly in junior high school settings. Furthermore, few studies have explored its effectiveness through an iterative Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the use of *Gimkit* as a digital learning medium to improve vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade students at UPTD SMPN 2 Kisaran, contributing to the growing body of research on educational technology in language learning.

METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design based on the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which includes four recursive stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Kemmis et al (2013) said that classroom action research generally includes the application of qualitative, interpretive approaches to investigation and data gathering conducted by educators (frequently with assistance from educational collaborators) aimed at educators forming assessments regarding how to enhance their own methods. The research was conducted in two cycles at UPTD SMPN 2 Kisaran, specifically in class VII-9 during the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. Each cycle consisted of one learning sessions lasting approximately 80 minutes each. In the planning stage, lesson plans and *Gimkit*-based vocabulary activities were prepared. During the action stage, the planned activities were implemented in the classroom. The observation stage involved monitoring student engagement, participation, and responses. The final stage, reflection, focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the instruction and making necessary revisions for the subsequent cycle. Revisions between cycles included the integration of visual aids and modifications to the gameplay format to better support vocabulary retention.

The participants in this study were 32 seventh-grade students from class VII-9, consisting of 10 female and 22 male students, aged between 12 and 13 years. Based on teacher assessments and initial observations, the students demonstrated beginner-level English proficiency. Most students came from lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds, and while the majority had access to mobile devices, few had prior experience using educational game-based platforms. None of the students had previously been introduced to *Gimkit* prior to this study.

The intervention involved the use of *Gimkit***,** a game-based digital learning platform, integrated into the teaching of English vocabulary under the theme of "Food and Drink." The instructional approach included a combination of direct explanation, guided practice, and interactive gameplay. *Gimkit* features a game mode like climbing the sky, where players must use energy to move upward. To gain or refill energy, students must correctly answer vocabulary questions. If their energy runs out, they cannot continue climbing until they answer more questions correctly. This game format encourages active participation and reinforces learning in an engaging, game-like environment. Vocabulary tasks were presented in multiple-choice formats, designed to encourage recognition, understanding, and retention. Each classroom session allocated 30–40 minutes for playing *Gimkit*, and the rest is discussion, feedback, and post-test. The researcher prepared and delivered the intervention after undergoing self-training and trial sessions to ensure smooth implementation.

Data were collected using several instruments to ensure accuracy and validity. The main instrument was a vocabulary test administered after each cycle, consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions. Each item had four options with only one correct answer and was scored with five point per correct response. These test items were reviewed by two English education lecturers to ensure content validity. The reliability of the test was verified through pilot testing, and the results indicated consistent performance across test items.

In addition to the vocabulary tests, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students per cycle. The interviews aimed to explore students' attitudes toward the learning process, their challenges in acquiring vocabulary, and their perceptions of *Gimkit* as a learning tool. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and transcribed for analysis.

Quantitative data from the vocabulary tests were analyzed descriptively by comparing mean scores in post-test in each cycle. The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion (70 out of 100) was calculated to determine the effectiveness of the

intervention. Qualitative data from interview was analyzed thematically. The researcher identified common themes related to student motivation, enjoyment, participation, and vocabulary challenges. These themes were then compared with the test results to draw more comprehensive conclusions.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the school principal and the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. Informed consent was obtained from all student participants and their parents or guardians. To ensure research quality and credibility, the researcher maintained a reflective journal to monitor bias, and member checking was conducted by allowing participants to confirm their interview responses. Peer discussions with fellow student-teachers were used to validate data interpretation and reduce potential subjectivity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to improve students' vocabulary mastery through the use of *Gimkit*, a game-based digital learning tool. The results from two cycles of Classroom Action Research (CAR) revealed a consistent improvement in students' vocabulary test scores and classroom engagement.

Findings

a. Pre-test

Prior to the intervention, a pre-test was administered to all 32 students in class VII-9. The results indicated that only 6 students (18.75%) met the Minimum Mastery Criterion (MMC) of 70 out of 100, with a mean score of 41.3**,** a highest score of 80, and a lowest score of 10. These results confirmed initial teacher observations that students had limited vocabulary knowledge and required a more engaging instructional approach.

Tabel 1: Initial Pre-test

Description	Pre-test
The number of students who complete the standard of minimum completeness	6
The number of students who not complete the standard of minimum completeness	26
Mean score	41.3

Highest score	80
Lowest score	10

Note: standard of minimum completeness is 70 of 100

b. Cyle 1

During Cycle 1**,** the intervention was implemented in one 80-minute session. Students participated in a *Gimkit*-based activity using vocabulary sets related to "Food and Drink." After the cycle, a post-test was conducted. Results showed improvement, with 15 students (46.87%) meeting the MMC, and a mean score of 60.3, an increase of 19 points from the pre-test.

Tabel 2: Initial Cycle 1

Description	Cycle 1
The number of students who complete the standard of minimum completeness	15
The number of students who not complete the standard of minimum completeness	17
Mean score	60.3
Highest score	90
Lowest score	30

There are several problems that still arise in the first cycle, namely some students still have difficulty remembering the meaning of English words and backwards. When after being taught by the researcher and the game, the students have forgotten the word that was just taught, for example the word salty, after the lesson ends the researcher tries to ask the student about the meaning of the word, but the student has forgotten the word.

Through interviews with seventh grade students, it was revealed that although the use of *Gimkit* made vocabulary learning more engaging and fun, some students still had difficulty retaining new words over time. They mentioned that although the game provided repeated exposure, its fast-paced nature and focus on competition sometimes caused them to prioritize speed over comprehension. Some students expressed indirectly the need for additional support such as contextual examples help reinforce the meaning and use of vocabulary in real-life situations.

These findings prompted revisions in Cycle 2**,** including the integration of image-based questions**,** repetition through rematch mode**,** and peer-assisted gameplay to enhance retrieval and visual encoding (Paivio, 1991; Mayer, 2020).

c. Cyle 2

Cycle 2 was conducted one meeting. In the second post-test**,** 29 students (90.6%) reached the MMC, with a mean score of 75.9**,** a highest score of 100, and a lowest score of 60. This represents a 34.6-point increase compared to the pre-test average and a 25.6% increase in the number of students meeting the MMC between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

Tabel 3: Initial Cycle 2

Description	Cycle 2
The number of students who complete the standard of minimum completeness	29
The number of students who not complete the standard of minimum completeness	3
Mean score	75,9
Highest score	100
Lowest score	60

In implementing the second cycle, researcher tried to overcome the problems that still emerged in the first cycle. He used activities in playing *Gimkit* with the picture that helped solve problems for class VII-9 at UPTD SMPN 2 Kisaran. The average of the post test results in cycle two was 75,9, and after doing the calculations it turned out that the students in that class whose grades passed or reached the criteria were above 90%. Not only that, based on paper observations, student engagement in class also increases during learning.

The results of student interviewsin cycle 2 revealed that the use of *Gimkit* combined with visual aids (pictures) helped most seventh-grade students better understand and memorize new vocabulary. Students stated that the integration of images with interactive game features made learning more meaningful and enjoyable. They felt that visuals supported their ability to connect words with real objects or situations, enhancing recall and comprehension.

However, despite the general improvement, three students did not pass the minimum passing criteria. Further interviews indicated that their underperformance was not due to the learning media itself, but rather external factors, such as prolonged illness and family-related issues. it affected their focus and participation during the learning process. These findings highlight the importance of considering students' personal circumstances when evaluating learning outcomes.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of *Gimkit* significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery over two instructional cycles. The average vocabulary scores increased from 41.3 (pre-test) to 75.9 (post-test, Cycle 2)**.** This progression aligns with previous research indicating that gamification enhances student motivation and cognitive processing through features like instant feedback, competition, and repetition (García-Sánchez & Luján-Mora, 2021; Reinders & Wattana, 2020). The energy-based feature in *Gimkit,* where players must answer questions to gain energy and continue playing, serves as a strong motivational factor for vocabulary learning. Since students need to recall and use the correct English words to progress in the game, it encourages repeated exposure and active engagement with vocabulary. This interactive mechanism not only makes learning fun but also helps students stay focused and motivated to remember new words.

Several cognitive learning theories help explain the success of this intervention. First, Repetition and Retrieval Practice theories suggest that repeated exposure to content strengthens memory (Tran, 2021). *Gimkit*'s question rematch mode enabled students to encounter the same vocabulary items multiple times. Second, Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991) supports the use of word-image combinations, which were introduced in Cycle 2 to enhance semantic memory. Third, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains how the elements of autonomy and competition in Gimkit may increase intrinsic motivation.

In addition to improved test scores, classroom observations and interviews revealed increased engagement, with more students voluntarily participating, showing enthusiasm during gameplay, and collaborating actively with peers. These behavioral changes suggest that students were more cognitively and emotionally invested during the learning process. However, the study also acknowledges that not all students improved equally. Three students did not reach the minimum criterion by the end of Cycle 2. However, despite overall improvement, three students failed to meet the passing criteria due to external factors like illness and family problems, not the learning media. This underscores the need to consider students' personal situations when assessing their progress.

The research also faced potential biases due to the dual role of the teacher-researcher, which may have influenced student performance or assessment interpretation. Additionally, environmental factors such as internet stability and device sharing may have affected learning conditions. Nonetheless, the results support earlier findings by Brillian et al. (2024), who found that the use of *Gimkit* led to higher student engagement and better learning outcomes.

Similarly, studies by Azizah (2024) and Avsar et al. (2023) affirm that gamified learning environments can reinforce vocabulary acquisition and provide a more enjoyable learning experience for students.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research results, the use of *Gimkit* media has proven effective in improving vocabulary mastery in grade VII students. This interactive learning media is able to create a fun, competitive learning atmosphere and motivate students to be more active in the learning process. The features in *Gimkit* that are gamified have been proven to be able to strengthen students' memory of the vocabulary being learned. In addition, student involvement in answering questions repeatedly also helps accelerate the process of understanding and retaining vocabulary. Thus, *Gimkit* can be used as an alternative, innovative, and relevant learning medium in teaching English, especially in vocabulary mastery. Given that this study was only conducted in one class in grade VII, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in other classes with a larger and more diverse sample size to obtain more general results. In addition, further research can explore the effectiveness of *Gimkit* in other aspects of language skills, such as reading, listening, or speaking. Teachers also suggest integrating this media continuously in the learning process to maintain consistency in increasing students' vocabulary mastery. The development of variations in material in Gimkit in accordance with the applicable curriculum also needs to be considered so that this media remains relevant and supports learning objectives.

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