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Implementation of Guessing Game Instructional Approach to Teach English Vocabulary Mastery in Senior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of English language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This study investigated the implementation of the Guessing Game Instructional Approach in teaching vocabulary mastery among senior high school students. A quasi-experimental design was employed involving 70 tenth-grade students at SMAN 1 Ciparay, consisting of an experimental group and a control group. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test vocabulary assessments and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including an independent samples t-test. The pre-test analysis revealed a significant baseline difference between groups, with the control group demonstrating higher initial vocabulary proficiency than the experimental group ($p < .001$). Post-test results also showed a significant difference ($t = -5.74, p < .001$), with the control group achieving a higher mean score ($M = 89.11$) than the experimental group ($M = 60.09$). Although students responded positively to the Guessing Game Instructional Approach, the findings suggest that it did not produce higher vocabulary achievement than conventional instruction. The study highlights the importance of considering initial group differences when evaluating instructional effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Language is the most essential means of human communication, functioning not only as a tool for expressing ideas but also as a medium for transmitting knowledge, values, and culture. In the field of language learning, vocabulary is widely recognized as a fundamental component of communicative competence. Vocabulary serves as the foundation of language use, as learners require an adequate range of words to comprehend spoken and written texts and to express

themselves effectively. As noted by Nation (2022), vocabulary constitutes the basis of all language skills, while Richards and Renandya (2002) emphasize its central role in supporting listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiency.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in Indonesia, vocabulary acquisition remains a significant challenge. Learners often have limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, making formal instruction the primary environment for language exposure. Ryan et al. (2024) reports that many senior high school students experience difficulties in developing vocabulary mastery due to insufficient exposure, ineffective instructional strategies, and low learning motivation. These challenges not only affect students' reading comprehension but also hinder their ability to communicate effectively in both spoken and written forms.

Traditional approaches to vocabulary instruction, such as rote memorization, dictionary-based learning, and repetitive drills, are still commonly applied in classroom settings. Although these methods may support short-term recall, they are often insufficient for fostering deeper understanding and long-term retention of vocabulary. Schmitt (2010) argues that such approaches tend to neglect meaningful learning processes and fail to engage learners actively. Furthermore, Mutiaraningrum and Nugroho (2021) highlight that conventional practices frequently result in passive learning conditions, where students perceive vocabulary learning as monotonous and disconnected from real-life communication needs.

In response to these limitations, the adoption of more interactive and engaging instructional approaches has become increasingly important. One such approach is game-based learning, which integrates elements of play into educational activities to enhance motivation, engagement, and interaction (Ilmita et al., 2025; Rizqi et al., 2025). Games have been widely acknowledged as effective tools in EFL contexts because they create enjoyable learning environments, reduce anxiety, and encourage active participation (Rizqi et al., 2025). Previous studies published in the *Journal of Educational Sciences* also demonstrated that interactive instructional strategies and game-based learning media can enhance students' vocabulary acquisition, engagement, and motivation in English language learning (Pitaloka et al., 2025; Vasya et al., 2025). Masduqi and Fatimah (2021) as well as Sofiana et al. (2025) emphasize that game-based learning can facilitate language practice in a more meaningful and less stressful manner.

Among various game-based strategies, the guessing game instructional approach has attracted attention as a practical method for teaching vocabulary. This approach requires learners to use reasoning, contextual clues, and prior knowledge to infer word meanings, thereby promoting deeper cognitive processing. Ananda et al. (2024) argue that such engagement enhances vocabulary retention and supports meaningful learning. In addition, guessing games are highly adaptable and can be implemented across a wide range of vocabulary topics, making them suitable for diverse classroom contexts.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the potential benefits of guessing games in vocabulary learning. Niarti et al. (2016) found that students who participated in guessing game activities showed significant improvement in vocabulary retention and higher levels of motivation compared to those taught using traditional methods. Similarly, Rahmah and Purnawa (2026) reported that game-based approaches improved student participation, reduced classroom anxiety, and created a more positive learning environment. Tamdang et al. (2024) further revealed that guessing games increased students' confidence in using new vocabulary during speaking activities, indicating their contribution to communicative competence.

Despite these promising findings, a critical gap remains in the literature. Most previous studies have focused on the outcomes of game-based learning, particularly in terms of motivation and achievement, while relatively limited attention has been given to how such approaches are implemented in actual classroom settings (Islami et al., 2025; Pahleviannur et al., 2022; Sofiah et al., 2025). Specifically, there is a lack of empirical investigation into the implementation process of the guessing game instructional approach in Indonesian senior high schools, including the challenges encountered and students' responses to the instructional practice.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation of the guessing game instructional approach in teaching English vocabulary mastery to senior high school students at SMAN 1 Ciparay. In particular, this study seeks to examine how the approach is implemented in classroom practice, to what extent it improves students' vocabulary mastery, and how students perceive its use in vocabulary learning. By addressing these aspects, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of game-based instructional strategies and their practical implications in EFL contexts.

2. Methodology

This study used a quantitative method with a Non-Equivalent Control Group Design (Quasi-Experimental Design) to examine the effect of the Guessing Game Instructional Approach on students' vocabulary mastery (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants in this study consisted of 70 tenth-grade students divided into two classes: an experimental class with 27 students and a control class with 43 students. The selection was made using purposive sampling to ensure that the sample was truly relevant, competent, and aligned with the specific objectives or criteria of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). The research design employed in this study was a Non-Equivalent Control Group Design, which involved both experimental and control groups receiving different instructional treatments. The structure of the research design is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Non-Equivalent Control Group Design

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental Group	O ₁	X	O ₂
Control Group	O ₁	—	O ₂

Research Instrument

The instrument used was a vocabulary test administered as pretest and posttest, consisting of multiple choice, matching, and sentence completion items. Content validity was reviewed by experts, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha with a coefficient above 0.70 (Pallant, 2010). A questionnaire was also distributed to identify students' perceptions toward the use of guessing games.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three stages: pretest, treatment, and posttest. The treatment was conducted in six meetings using guessing game activities such as Describe and Guess, Charades, and Pictionary to support vocabulary learning.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test to determine significant differences between pretest and posttest scores (Ngumar et al., 2025). Questionnaire data were analyzed using percentages and mean scores to describe students' responses toward the treatment. This study followed research ethics principles involving voluntary participation, confidentiality, and institutional permission (Cohen et al., 2009).

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study investigating the implementation of the Guessing Game Instructional Approach in teaching English vocabulary mastery among senior high school students at SMAN 1 Ciparay. The analysis focuses on the comparison between the experimental group (Class X-8), which received the guessing game instructional treatment, and the control group (Class X-5), which received conventional vocabulary instruction. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including tests of normality, homogeneity of variance, independent samples t-test, and questionnaire analysis to identify students' perceptions toward the instructional approach.

The implementation of the Guessing Game Instructional Approach was conducted through six instructional sessions over a three-week period and was systematically integrated into English vocabulary lessons. Each session began with the introduction of target vocabulary relevant to the learning objectives, followed by guided practice through various guessing game activities, including Describe and Guess, 20 Questions, Charades, and Pictionary. During these activities, students worked individually or collaboratively to describe, provide clues, ask questions, and identify target words without explicitly mentioning them. This process encouraged learners to actively retrieve, comprehend, and apply vocabulary in meaningful communicative contexts. Following the game activities, the teacher facilitated a reflection stage to review the target vocabulary, clarify word meanings, and reinforce students' understanding. Therefore, the guessing game treatment

functioned not merely as an entertaining classroom activity but as a structured instructional strategy consisting of vocabulary presentation, communicative practice, and reflective learning stages designed to enhance students' vocabulary mastery.

Descriptive Statistics

Before the implementation of the Guessing Game Instructional Approach, a pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups to assess students' initial vocabulary mastery and determine the comparability of the two groups at the beginning of the study. The pre-test results provided baseline data that were essential for evaluating the effectiveness of the instructional treatment and identifying any differences in students' vocabulary proficiency prior to the intervention. The descriptive statistical summary of the pre-test scores for both groups is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test Score

Statistic	Experiment (X-8)	Control (X-5)	Note
N (Sample Size)	27	43	
Mean	68.63	86.88	Control scored higher
Median	73.00	91.00	
Standard Deviation	23.37	11.57	Experiment more varied
Variance	546.09	133.87	
Minimum Score	20	35	
Maximum Score	94	94	

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores for both the experimental and control groups. The results show that the control group obtained a higher mean score ($M = 86.88$) than the experimental group ($M = 68.63$), indicating a higher level of vocabulary mastery before the treatment. The median scores also showed a similar pattern, with the control group achieving 91.00 compared to 73.00 in the experimental group. Furthermore, the experimental group exhibited a substantially larger standard deviation ($SD = 23.37$) than the control group ($SD = 11.57$), suggesting greater variability in students' vocabulary proficiency.

This finding indicates that students in the experimental group exhibited a wider range of vocabulary knowledge, whereas the control group demonstrated relatively homogeneous performance. The minimum and maximum scores further illustrate this variation, as the experimental group recorded a wider score range (20–94) than the control group (35–94). In short, the descriptive statistics suggest notable differences in the initial vocabulary performance of the two groups before the implementation of the instructional treatment. To determine whether the pre-test data met the assumption of normality required for subsequent inferential analyses, a Shapiro–Wilk normality test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Tests of Normality of Pre-Test

Group	W Statistic	p-value	α
Experiment (X-8)	0.8949	0.0102	0.05
Control (X-5)	0.5924	0.0000	0.05

Table 3 presents the results of the Shapiro–Wilk normality test for the pre-test scores. The findings indicate that both the experimental group ($W = 0.8949$, $p = .0102$) and the control group ($W = 0.5924$, $p < .001$) obtained p-values lower than the significance level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of normality was rejected, suggesting that the pre-test scores in both groups were not normally distributed. The results indicate that the distribution of students' vocabulary scores deviated from the assumption of normality in both groups. Such deviations may reflect variations in students' initial vocabulary proficiency and the unequal distribution of scores within each group. Although the data did not satisfy the normality assumption, further assumption testing was conducted to examine the homogeneity of variance between the two groups before proceeding with the inferential analysis. Assessing variance homogeneity is important to determine whether the groups have comparable score variability and to ensure the appropriateness of subsequent statistical procedures. The results of the homogeneity test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Test of Homogeneity of Variances of Pre-Test

Test	F Statistic	p-value	α	Interpretation
Levene's Test	25.94	< .001	.05	Not Homogeneous

Table 4 presents the results of Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the pre-test scores. The analysis yielded an F value of 25.9429 with a p-value below the significance level of .05 ($p < .001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis of equal variances was rejected, indicating that the variances of the experimental and control groups were not homogeneous. The results suggest that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not satisfied for the pre-test data. This finding indicates that the distribution of scores differed between the two groups in terms of variability prior to the implementation of the treatment.

Given the observed differences in variance, subsequent analyses should be interpreted with consideration of the unequal group characteristics. Although the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were not fully satisfied, the independent samples t-test was retained because the test is generally robust to moderate violations of these assumptions, particularly when comparing group means and when substantial mean differences are present. Furthermore, given the unequal variances observed between groups, the interpretation of the results was based on Welch's correction, which provides a more reliable estimate under heteroscedastic conditions. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted with caution due to the baseline differences between groups. To further examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups before the treatment, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Independent Samples Test of Pre-Test

Test	t Statistic	p-value	α	Interpretation
Independent Samples t-Test	-4.35	< .001	.05	Significant Difference

Table 5 presents the results of the independent samples t-test conducted on the pre-test scores. The analysis yielded a t-value of -4.3543 with a p-value below the significance level of .05 ($p < .001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups before the implementation of the treatment. This finding suggests that the two groups were not equivalent at baseline, with the control group demonstrating higher initial vocabulary proficiency than the experimental group. Consequently, the pre-existing differences between the groups should be taken into account when interpreting the effectiveness of the instructional treatment and the subsequent post-test results. Following the completion of the treatment, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to examine students' vocabulary performance in the post-test. The results of the post-test descriptive statistics are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Post-Test Scores

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Experimental (X-8)	27	60.09	20.46	36	94
Control (X-5)	43	89.11	5.56	79	94

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics of the post-test scores for both the experimental and control groups. The results show that the control group obtained a higher mean score ($M = 89.11$) than the experimental group ($M = 60.09$), indicating better vocabulary performance at the end of the instructional period. The difference in mean scores suggests a disparity in post-test achievement between the two groups. In terms of score distribution, the experimental group exhibited a considerably larger standard deviation ($SD = 20.46$) than the control group ($SD = 5.56$), indicating greater variability in students' post-test performance. Furthermore, the score range of the experimental group (36–94) was wider than that of the control group (79–94), suggesting that students in the experimental group demonstrated more diverse levels of vocabulary achievement. To determine whether the post-test data met the assumption of normality required for subsequent inferential analyses, a Shapiro–Wilk normality test was conducted. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test of Post-Test

Group	W Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Experimental (X-8)	0.891	.144	Normal
Control (X-5)	0.820	.003	Not Normal

Table 7 presents the results of the Shapiro–Wilk normality test for the post-test scores. The findings indicate that the experimental group achieved a p-value greater than the significance level of .05 ($W = 0.891$, $p = .144$), suggesting that the post-test scores were normally distributed. In contrast, the control group obtained a p-

value lower than .05 ($W = 0.820$, $p = .0029$), indicating that the post-test scores did not meet the assumption of normality. These results demonstrate that the normality assumption was satisfied for the experimental group but not for the control group. Given the differing distributional characteristics of the two groups, further assumption testing was conducted to examine the homogeneity of variances before proceeding with the comparative analysis of post-test performance. The results of the homogeneity test are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Test of Homogeneity of Variances of Post-Test Score

Test	Levene Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Homogeneity of Variance	12.49	.001	Not Homogeneous

Table 8 presents the results of Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the post-test scores. The analysis yielded a Levene statistic of 12.49 with a p-value of .00149, which is lower than the significance level of .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of equal variances was rejected, indicating that the post-test variances of the experimental and control groups were not homogeneous. The results suggest that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not satisfied for the post-test data. This finding indicates that the variability of scores differed between the two groups following the instructional treatment. To further examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in post-test vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Independent Samples t-Test Result of Post-Test

Test	t	df	p-value	Interpretation
Independent Samples t-Test	-5.74	27	< .001	Significant Difference

Table 9 presents the results of the independent samples t-test conducted on the post-test scores. The analysis yielded a t-value of -5.74 with 27 degrees of freedom and a p-value below the significance level of .05 ($p < .001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference in post-test vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups. The findings demonstrate that the vocabulary achievement of the two groups differed significantly following the instructional treatment. Based on the descriptive statistics presented in Table 5, the control group obtained a higher mean score than the experimental group. To further examine the practical significance of the observed difference, an effect size analysis using Cohen's d was conducted. The results of the effect size analysis are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Effect Size Analysis

Cohen's d Value	Interpretation
0.20	Small
0.50	Medium
0.80	Large
2.20	Very Large

Table 10 presents the results of the effect size analysis based on Cohen's *d*. The analysis yielded a Cohen's *d* value of 2.20, indicating a very large effect size. According to Cohen's guidelines, effect size values exceeding 0.80 are considered large, suggesting that the difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups was substantial in practical terms. The effect size analysis complements the results of the independent samples *t*-test by demonstrating that the observed difference was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful. To further explore students' responses to the instructional treatment, questionnaire data were analyzed to examine their perceptions of the Guessing Game Instructional Approach. The summary of the questionnaire results is presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Questionnaire Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Overall Response	3.72	0.82	Agree
Preference and Perception	3.95	0.76	Agree
Confidence and Communication	3.36	0.88	Neutral

Table 11 presents the results of the questionnaire analysis regarding students' perceptions of the Guessing Game Instructional Approach. The findings indicate that students generally responded positively to the instructional strategy, as reflected by the overall mean score of 3.72, which falls within the "Agree" category. This result suggests that students perceived the use of guessing games as a beneficial and engaging approach to vocabulary learning. Among the measured dimensions, the highest mean score was obtained for the Preference and Perception aspect ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.76$), indicating that students enjoyed the learning activities and expressed favorable attitudes toward the use of guessing games in the classroom. In contrast, the Confidence and Communication dimension yielded a lower mean score ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.88$), which falls within the "Neutral" category. This finding suggests that although students generally appreciated the instructional approach, its influence on learners' confidence and communication skills was less pronounced. Overall, the questionnaire results demonstrate that the Guessing Game Instructional Approach was positively received by students and contributed to a more engaging learning experience. These findings provide additional insight into the affective benefits of game-based learning, complementing the quantitative results obtained from the vocabulary achievement tests.

Discussions of Finding

The findings of this study revealed a complex relationship between instructional approach and vocabulary mastery outcomes. However, the interpretation of the treatment effect should be approached cautiously because the pre-test analysis revealed a statistically significant baseline difference between the experimental and control groups. The control group demonstrated substantially higher initial vocabulary proficiency before the treatment was implemented, indicating that the two groups were not equivalent at the beginning of the study. First, the significantly lower performance of the experimental group cannot be interpreted solely as the ineffectiveness of the guessing game approach. The pre-test results clearly show

that the experimental group started with substantially lower vocabulary proficiency. Vocabulary has been widely recognized as the foundation of language competence, and insufficient vocabulary limits learners' ability to comprehend and produce language effectively (Nation, 2022; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Therefore, the initial disparity likely influenced the post-test outcomes, suggesting that the instructional effect was confounded by baseline differences (Sari et al., 2025).

Second, the high variability within the experimental group indicates that guessing games may affect students differently depending on their proficiency level. Guessing games are an educational tool that engages learners by prompting them to utilize contextual clues, draw upon their prior knowledge, and apply reasoning skills to infer meanings. This process necessitates deeper cognitive processing, thereby enhancing learning outcomes and critical thinking abilities (Ananda et al., 2024). However, students with stronger vocabulary foundations may benefit more from inferencing and interactive tasks, while lower-level learners may struggle due to insufficient lexical resources. This explains why the outcomes appear inconsistent.

Third, despite the lower test scores, the questionnaire results show that students responded positively to the guessing game approach, particularly in terms of motivation and engagement. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that game-based learning enhances motivation, participation, and classroom interaction (Hidayah et al., 2023). Additionally, Faida and Wijianto (2024) reported that guessing games significantly improve learners' motivation and vocabulary retention, suggesting that such approaches create a more enjoyable and supportive learning environment.

However, the discrepancy between positive perceptions and lower achievement suggests that implementation factors play a crucial role. One possible explanation is the lack of instructional alignment. As noted by Wright et al. (2006), Games must be carefully structured and aligned with learning objectives; otherwise, they risk becoming mere entertainment rather than effective learning tools. In addition, time constraints and classroom dynamics, such as unequal participation among students, may limit the effectiveness of guessing games. Several factors may explain this;

1. Insufficient scaffolding

Students with low vocabulary levels may require more structured guidance before engaging in guessing activities.

2. Time limitation

Game-based activities may reduce time allocated for explicit vocabulary instruction and reinforcement.

3. Cognitive demand

Guessing games require higher-order thinking (inferencing), which may be challenging for beginners.

4. Classroom management and participation imbalance

More active students may dominate, limiting equal learning opportunities.

From a broader perspective, the findings indicate that guessing games should not replace traditional instruction entirely but rather complement it. A balanced

approach integrating explicit teaching and interactive activities is likely to produce more optimal results.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the implementation of the guessing game instructional approach in teaching English vocabulary mastery among senior high school students. The findings indicate that although the approach successfully created an engaging and motivating learning environment, it did not result in higher vocabulary achievement compared to conventional instruction. The experimental group demonstrated lower post-test performance than the control group, which appears to be influenced by initial differences in vocabulary proficiency as well as variations in students' ability to engage with cognitively demanding tasks.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the guessing game approach was found to depend on several critical factors, including the provision of sufficient scaffolding, alignment between instructional activities and assessment, and adequate time allocation. Students with stronger vocabulary foundations benefited more from the inferential and interactive nature of the activities, while lower-level learners required more structured support. Despite these limitations, students showed positive responses toward the approach, indicating its potential to enhance motivation, participation, and classroom interaction.

In conclusion, the guessing game instructional approach cannot be considered more effective than conventional methods in improving short-term vocabulary mastery in this context. However, it remains a valuable complementary strategy when integrated with explicit instruction. One limitation of this study is the presence of significant baseline differences between groups, which may have influenced the interpretation of the treatment effect. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and cannot be attributed solely to the instructional approach. Future studies are recommended to employ longer intervention periods, ensure group equivalence, and incorporate structured scaffolding to optimize the effectiveness of game-based learning in vocabulary instruction.

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