Explorations in English Learning

Visualizing Vocabulary and Communicative Competence: The Use of Picture Word Media among Seventh-Grade Students

***1 Agustina Susanti Ina, [1]Hernina Dewi Lestari, [1]Yahmun**

[1]Universitas Insan Budi Utomo, East Java, Indonesia

*Corresponding author, email: asthyina1@gmail.com

Abstract Although vocabulary is a fundamental component of English language learning, many EFL students still experience limited vocabulary mastery and low communicative competence, particularly in classroom contexts where instruction remains teacher-centered and lacks visual support. This gap highlights the need for effective instructional media that can enhance both vocabulary acquisition and communicative ability simultaneously. This study aimed to improve students' vocabulary mastery and communicative competence through the use of picture word media among seventh-grade students at SMP Swasta Bukambero in the 2024–2025 academic year. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted in two cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. The participants were 32 seventh-grade students. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and vocabulary tests (pre-test and post-test). The findings showed a significant improvement in vocabulary mastery: the pre-test mean score was 43 (13% passing), Cycle I increased to 70 (56% passing), and Cycle II reached 83 (90% passing). Classroom observations and interviews also indicated improved communicative competence, as students became more active, confident, and engaged in classroom interaction. They demonstrated better understanding of vocabulary, increased participation in discussions, and improved ability to express ideas. The learning process also shifted toward a more student-centered environment. Therefore, picture word media is effective in improving vocabulary mastery and supporting communicative competence in EFL learning.

Keywords picture word media; vocabulary mastery; communicative competence; classroom action research; mix-method design

INTRODUCTION

Learning English involves the development of four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interconnected and should be developed in an integrated manner to enable learners to communicate effectively in both spoken and written forms. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, students are expected not only to understand grammatical structures but also to use language meaningfully for communication. Among the various components of language learning, vocabulary plays a central role because it serves as the foundation for understanding and expressing ideas. Students with limited vocabulary often experience difficulties in comprehending texts, following classroom instructions, participating in discussions, and conveying their thoughts accurately. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, effective communication becomes difficult even when learners possess adequate grammatical knowledge. Consequently, vocabulary mastery is widely recognized as one of the most important

DOI: https://doi.org/10.61277/exel.v2i1.284

Received, March 7th, 2026 | Revised, June 18th, 2026 | Accepted, June 25th, 2026

Copyright ©2026 by Authors, published by *Sumber Belajar Sejahtera*

This is an open-access article distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

predictors of success in language learning and communicative competence (Nation, 2022; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Teng, 2022; Webb & Nation, 2023).

Vocabulary refers to the collection of words that individuals know and use in communication. However, vocabulary mastery extends beyond simply knowing the meaning of words. It also involves understanding pronunciation, spelling, grammatical functions, collocations, and appropriate use in different contexts. Vocabulary knowledge supports all four language skills and acts as a bridge connecting listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Webb & Nation, 2023). Research has consistently demonstrated that vocabulary size and depth significantly influence learners' ability to comprehend input and produce meaningful output in EFL settings (Milton, 2021; Wei & Fan, 2022). Students with insufficient vocabulary knowledge frequently struggle to express opinions, answer questions, understand information, and participate confidently in classroom interactions. As a result, vocabulary mastery is considered a fundamental component of communicative competence and successful language learning.

The importance of vocabulary mastery has been highlighted in numerous studies. Learners with larger vocabularies generally demonstrate better performance in reading comprehension, speaking fluency, writing quality, and listening comprehension (Nation, 2022; Teng, 2022; Webb & Nation, 2023). Vocabulary knowledge also contributes to students' confidence and willingness to communicate because it enables them to express ideas more accurately and participate more actively in learning activities. Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge supports learners in understanding academic content and engaging in meaningful social interactions (Wei & Fan, 2022; Reynolds et al., 2022). Therefore, vocabulary instruction should not be limited to memorizing word lists but should provide meaningful learning experiences that help students understand, retain, and use vocabulary in authentic communication. Effective vocabulary teaching requires the use of appropriate instructional strategies and engaging learning media that can motivate students and facilitate long-term retention.

Based on preliminary interviews conducted with the English teacher at SMP Swasta Bukambero, several problems related to vocabulary learning were identified among seventh-grade students. First, many students demonstrated limited vocabulary knowledge, which affected their ability to understand English lessons and participate actively during classroom activities. Students often encountered unfamiliar words in learning materials and relied heavily on translation to understand meanings. This situation reduced their confidence and limited their participation in English communication. These issues are consistent with recent findings that insufficient vocabulary knowledge continues to be a major barrier in EFL comprehension and communication development (Nation & Webb, 2023; Webb & Nation, 2023). Second, students showed low motivation and engagement during vocabulary learning activities. Classroom instruction was primarily based on textbooks and conventional teaching methods, resulting in monotonous learning experiences that failed to sustain students' interest and attention. Consequently, students became passive learners and showed limited involvement in classroom interaction. Recent studies indicate that learner motivation and engagement in vocabulary learning can be significantly improved through interactive and technology-enhanced instruction, such as game-based learning and mobile-assisted activities (Çoban Sural & Yaşar Sağlık, 2024; Duan et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). In addition, research shows that digital and gamified vocabulary learning environments promote repeated exposure, active participation, and stronger retention, which directly enhance learner motivation and achievement (Nurhasanah et al., 2026; Zhang et al., 2024). Similarly,

learner engagement in digital environments has been shown to positively influence vocabulary development through behavioral, cognitive, and emotional involvement (Zhang et al., 2023). These findings indicate the need for more engaging instructional media that can support vocabulary learning while simultaneously encouraging active communication and participation.

One instructional medium that has considerable potential to address these challenges is picture word media. Picture word media combine visual images with written words to facilitate vocabulary learning through visual association. The effectiveness of visual media can be explained through Dual Coding Theory, which proposes that information is processed through both verbal and visual systems, resulting in stronger learning and memory retention when both channels are activated simultaneously (Paivio, 2007). Similarly, the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning suggests that learners understand information more effectively when verbal and visual representations are integrated appropriately (Mayer, 2021). In vocabulary learning, pictures help learners establish meaningful connections between words and their corresponding concepts, making vocabulary easier to understand and remember. Recent studies have shown that multimodal and picture-supported instruction significantly improves vocabulary acquisition, retention, and learner engagement in EFL contexts (Li et al., 2022; Teng, 2022; Yu & Liu, 2022). Furthermore, visual media create a more enjoyable learning environment, increase students' attention, and encourage active participation during classroom activities.

Previous research has provided evidence that picture-based instructional media positively influence vocabulary learning outcomes. Studies have reported significant improvements in students' vocabulary achievement, reading performance, learner engagement, and vocabulary retention following the use of picture-supported learning materials (Andriani et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2022). Research on multimedia-assisted vocabulary instruction also indicates that visual learning resources facilitate meaningful learning experiences and improve long-term retention of vocabulary knowledge (Li et al., 2022; Lei & Reynolds, 2022). However, despite these positive findings, most previous studies have focused primarily on vocabulary gains and reading achievement. Limited attention has been given to the potential of picture word media to improve both vocabulary mastery and communicative competence simultaneously, particularly among junior high school EFL learners in Indonesia. This gap is important because vocabulary learning should ultimately contribute not only to word recognition but also to learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

Based on the problems identified in the classroom and the findings of previous studies, this study aims to investigate the use of picture word media in improving students' vocabulary mastery and communicative competence among seventh-grade students at SMP Swasta Bukambero in the 2024–2025 academic year. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to English language teaching by providing empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of picture word media in enhancing students' vocabulary learning and communication skills. The findings may also provide useful guidance for English teachers seeking innovative and engaging instructional strategies to improve students' language learning outcomes. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How does the use of picture word media improve students' vocabulary mastery and communicative competence among seventh-grade students at SMP Swasta Bukambero?

METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve students' vocabulary mastery and communicative competence through the use of picture word media. CAR was selected because it allows teachers and researchers to systematically identify classroom problems and implement iterative improvements directly within instructional practice. Recent scholarship highlights that action research is particularly effective in language education contexts because it bridges theory and classroom realities while promoting reflective teaching practices (Burns, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018). Following the cyclical model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the research was conducted through repeated stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The study was implemented in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of two meetings, enabling continuous refinement of instructional strategies based on classroom evidence and learner response patterns.

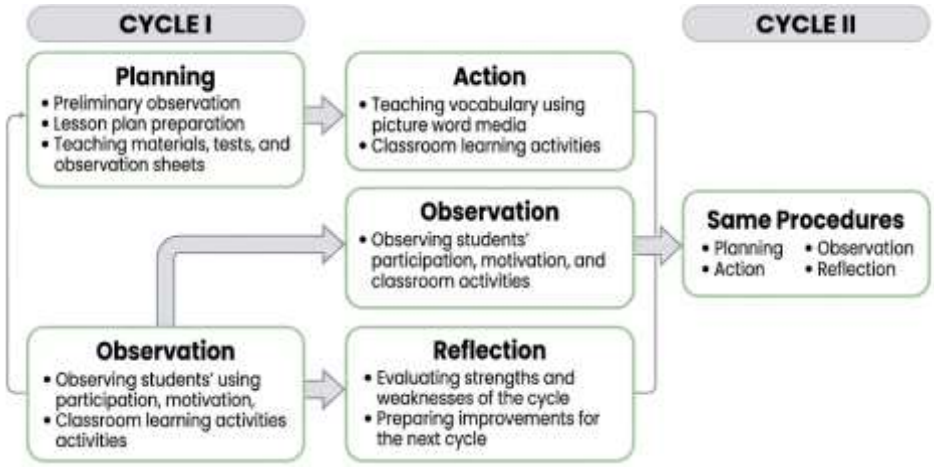

Figure 1. Classroom action research cycle

Based on Figure 1, the research was conducted at SMP Swasta Bukambero during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants were 32 seventh-grade students selected through purposive consideration based on preliminary classroom observations indicating low vocabulary mastery, limited participation, and low confidence in English communication. In EFL contexts, early secondary learners are often considered a critical stage for vocabulary development and communicative skill formation, as language exposure and motivation strongly influence long-term proficiency development (Nation, 2022; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Furthermore, the school context reflected a reliance on conventional teacher-centered instruction, which is widely reported to limit interactional opportunities in language classrooms and reduce learner engagement (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Ellis, 2021). These conditions justified the selection of this setting as appropriate for examining the pedagogical impact of picture word media.

Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and tests to ensure methodological triangulation and strengthen the validity of findings. Classroom observation was conducted to document students' participation, motivation, interaction patterns, and responses during learning activities. Structured observation instruments are widely recommended in classroom-based research because they allow systematic recording of behavioral indicators in instructional settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ary et al., 2019). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher and selected students to gain deeper insights into learning difficulties, classroom dynamics, and perceptions of picture word media. Interview

data provided contextual explanations that complemented observational findings, particularly in understanding learner attitudes and engagement shifts during the intervention process.

The research followed the four stages of CAR systematically. In the planning stage, the researcher conducted preliminary observations, analyzed curriculum requirements, designed lesson plans, developed picture word media, and prepared instruments including observation sheets, interview guides, and vocabulary tests. In the action stage, vocabulary instruction was delivered using picture word media through interactive tasks designed to promote meaningful engagement and contextual learning. Research in visual-based language instruction indicates that multimodal input enhances vocabulary retention by linking linguistic input with visual memory systems (Mayer, 2021; Plass & Jones, 2020). During the observation stage, students' engagement, interaction, and learning challenges were recorded in real time. In the reflection stage, findings from observations, interviews, and test results were evaluated collaboratively with the English teacher to identify strengths and weaknesses, which then informed improvements in the subsequent cycle.

The research instruments consisted of observation sheets, semi-structured interview guidelines, and vocabulary tests. Observation sheets captured indicators of student participation, motivation, interaction, and responsiveness during instructional activities. Semi-structured interviews enabled flexible but focused data collection regarding learners' experiences and perceptions of the instructional media, which is considered essential in qualitative classroom research for capturing authentic learner perspectives (Patton, 2015; Cohen et al., 2018). Vocabulary mastery was assessed using a pre-test and post-test consisting of 20 fill-in-the-blank items targeting vocabulary meaning, spelling, and contextual usage. Pre-tests and post-tests remain widely accepted in classroom-based intervention studies as effective tools for measuring instructional impact on learning outcomes (Brown & Lee, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns of student engagement, motivation, interaction, and learning behavior changes across cycles. This approach aligns with thematic interpretation methods commonly used in classroom research to capture developmental changes in learner behavior (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Quantitative data from pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed by comparing mean score improvements to determine the effectiveness of picture word media in enhancing vocabulary mastery. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings strengthened the overall interpretation and ensured methodological triangulation, which is recommended for increasing validity in educational intervention studies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

FINDINGS

This part presents the findings of the research based on data collected through observation, interviews, and tests.

Students' vocabulary mastery test on picture word media implementation

Table 1. The vocabulary test result before (pre-test) and after (Cycle I and Cycle II) the implementation of picture word media

Stage	Number of Students	Students Passed	Students Failed	Average Score	Passing Percentage	Category
Pre-Test	32	4	28	43	13%	Poor
Cycle I	32	18	14	70	56%	Fair
Cycle II	32	29	3	83	90%	Good

The table above presents the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery from the pre-test to Cycle II. It can be seen that there was a significant increase in students' performance after the implementation of picture word media. In the pre-test, only 4 out of 32 students (13%) passed, while 28 students (87%) failed, with an average score of 43, which is categorized as poor. In Cycle I, the number of students who passed increased to 18 students (56%), while 14 students (44%) still failed, and the average score improved to 70, categorized as fair. Furthermore, in Cycle II, there was a substantial improvement, with 29 students (90%) passing and only 3 students (10%) failing. The average score increased to 83, which is categorized as good. These results indicate that students' vocabulary mastery improved during the implementation of picture word media. The improvement suggests that picture word media may have contributed positively to students' vocabulary learning.

Students' communicative competence on the implementation of picture word media

Table 2 Comparison of Students' Observation Results in Cycle I and Cycle II

No	Aspects Observed	Cycle I	Category	Cycle II	Category
1	Students pay attention during opening learning	4	VG	4	VG
2	Students listen to learning objectives	4	VG	4	VG
3	Students respond during apperception	4	VG	4	VG
4	Students understand/explain learning material	2	E	4	VG
5	Students answer questions	2	E	4	VG
6	Interaction between students	2	E	4	VG
7	Active involvement in learning	2	E	4	VG
8	Ability to utilize media	2	E	4	VG
9	Interaction with learning media	4	VG	4	VG
10	Students' interest in media	2	E	4	VG
11	Students ask questions	4	VG	4	VG
12	Students complete tasks/exercises	2	E	4	VG
13	Students summarize the material	4	VG	4	VG
14	Students reflect on learning	—	—	4	VG

The table above shows a comparison of students' learning activities between Cycle I and Cycle II. In Cycle I, several aspects such as paying attention during the opening, listening to learning

objectives, responding to apperception, interacting with media, asking questions, and summarizing the material were categorized as Very Good (VG). However, many important aspects in the core learning process, including understanding the material, answering questions, interacting with peers, active involvement, utilizing media, interest in learning media, and completing tasks, were only categorized as Enough (E).

In contrast, Cycle II shows a significant improvement in all aspects of observation. Almost all aspects were categorized as Very Good (VG), indicating that students became more active, engaged, and confident during the learning process. Students were able to understand the material better, actively participate in discussions, collaborate effectively, and utilize the media optimally. Additionally, students demonstrated the ability to reflect on their learning, which did not appear in Cycle I.

The comparison between Cycle I and Cycle II suggests noticeable improvements in students' learning behavior and engagement. In Cycle I, students tended to be passive during the core learning activities despite showing good attention at the beginning of the lesson. This suggests that initial interest alone was not sufficient to support deeper understanding and active participation. However, in Cycle II, after improvements in teaching strategies and more effective use of picture word media, students demonstrated a more consistent level of engagement throughout all stages of the lesson. The shift from *Enough (E)* to *Very Good (VG)* in most aspects reflects not only an increase in participation but also an improvement in students' confidence, collaboration skills, and ability to use learning media independently. This finding suggests that visual media combined with interactive learning activities may support classroom interaction and contribute positively to students' learning outcomes.

Table 3 Interview results on the implementation of picture word media toward students' communicative competence

No	Respondent	Indicator of Communicative Competence	Before Implementation	After Implementation	Interpretation
1	Teacher	Students' motivation to communicate	Students were passive, less confident, and rarely participated in class discussions	Students became more active, confident, and willing to participate in discussions	Picture word media increased students' motivation and confidence in communication
2	Teacher	Students' vocabulary usage	Students had limited vocabulary and difficulty expressing ideas	Students were able to use more vocabulary and express ideas more clearly	Visual support helped students understand and apply vocabulary in context
3	Teacher	Classroom interaction	Interaction was limited and teacher-centered	Interaction became more active and student-centered	Picture word media encouraged more interactive learning
4	Teacher	Students' participation	Only a few students were actively involved	Most students participated actively in learning activities	Media created a more engaging learning environment

No	Respondent	Indicator of Communicative Competence	Before Implementation	After Implementation	Interpretation
5	Students	Interest in learning English	Students felt bored and uninterested	Students found learning fun and interesting	Picture word media increased students' interest in learning
6	Students	Understanding vocabulary	Students had difficulty understanding word meanings	Students understood vocabulary more easily through pictures	Visual representation supported comprehension
7	Students	Confidence in speaking	Students were shy and afraid of making mistakes	Students became more confident in speaking and expressing ideas	Media reduced anxiety and built confidence
8	Students	Ability to communicate ideas	Students struggled to express ideas clearly	Students were able to communicate ideas better using learned vocabulary	Vocabulary mastery improved communicative competence
9	Students	Participation in group discussion	Students were passive in group activities	Students actively participated and collaborated with peers	Media encouraged collaboration and interaction
10	Students	Classroom atmosphere	Learning was monotonous and less interactive	Learning became active, enjoyable, and interactive	Picture word media created a positive learning environment

The interview results suggest improvements in students' confidence, participation, and willingness to communicate after the implementation of picture word media. Before the intervention, students generally showed low motivation, limited participation, and a lack of confidence in using English. They tended to be passive during classroom activities and had difficulty expressing their ideas due to limited vocabulary mastery. In addition, the learning process was mostly teacher-centered, which reduced opportunities for students to actively engage in communication. These conditions indicate that students' communicative competence was still underdeveloped and required an effective instructional approach to support their language use.

After the implementation of picture word media, both teachers and students reported noticeable positive changes in the learning process. Students became more motivated and interested in learning English, as the use of visual media made the lessons more engaging and enjoyable. The pictures helped students understand vocabulary more easily and provided contextual support for expressing ideas. As a result, students showed increased confidence in speaking and were more willing to participate in classroom discussions. Furthermore, classroom interaction became more dynamic, shifting from a teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered learning environment where students actively contributed to the learning process.

Moreover, the findings indicate that picture word media not only improved students' vocabulary mastery but also enhanced their ability to communicate effectively. Students were able to use newly learned vocabulary to express ideas more clearly and participate actively in group discussions. Collaboration among students also improved, as they worked together to interpret pictures and construct meaningful sentences. This suggests that the integration of visual media in

language learning can foster both linguistic competence and social interaction skills. Therefore, the findings suggest that picture word media may support the development of students' communicative competence by creating a more interactive, supportive, and meaningful learning environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of picture word media was associated with improvements in students' vocabulary mastery and classroom communication among seventh-grade students at SMP Swasta Bukambero. The improvement can be seen from the students' vocabulary test results, observation findings, and interview results conducted during the research process. After the implementation of picture word media, students showed better understanding of vocabulary, increased participation during classroom activities, and greater confidence in communicating in English. In Cycle II, 29 out of 32 students (90%) successfully achieved the minimum mastery criterion, with an average score of 83 categorized as good. Since the success criteria required at least 75% of students to achieve the minimum mastery criterion, the study was considered successful. Therefore, the researcher and collaborator decided to stop the action in Cycle II because the objectives of the study had been achieved. These findings are consistent with recent research showing that visual-based instruction can improve vocabulary acquisition and learner engagement in EFL classrooms through repeated exposure and contextualized input (Zhang & Chen, 2021; Kim & Kwon, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2023).

One possible explanation for the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery is that picture word media provided visual support that may have helped students understand and remember vocabulary more easily through visual representation. Pictures provided contextual support that enabled students to associate words with objects, actions, or situations directly. This aligns with Dual Coding Theory, which suggests that combining verbal and visual input enhances memory retention by creating two cognitive pathways for information processing (Paivio, 2014; Liu & Wang, 2022). In addition, multimedia learning theory also supports the idea that visual materials reduce cognitive load and improve comprehension by making abstract vocabulary more concrete and meaningful for learners (Mayer, 2021). Recent studies further confirm that visual association strengthens long-term vocabulary retention and recall accuracy in second language learners (Kim & Kwon, 2023; Zhang & Chen, 2021).

Furthermore, the use of picture word media created a more enjoyable and interactive learning atmosphere, which increased students' motivation and engagement during the learning process. As students became more interested in learning activities, they participated more actively and showed greater enthusiasm in understanding vocabulary materials. This is supported by recent findings that learner engagement in EFL classrooms increases significantly when instruction includes multimodal and visually rich learning resources (Pham & Nguyen, 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2024). Motivation theory in language learning also emphasizes that meaningful input and enjoyable learning experiences play a crucial role in sustaining students' attention and willingness to participate (Dörnyei, 2020). Therefore, picture word media can be considered a motivational scaffold that supports both emotional and cognitive engagement in vocabulary learning.

Furthermore, the observation results showed improvement in students' communicative behavior from Cycle I to Cycle II. In Cycle I, several aspects of classroom participation, such as answering

questions, interacting with peers, utilizing learning media, and participating actively in discussions, were still inconsistent. However, after improvements in teaching strategies and the implementation of more interactive learning activities in Cycle II, most aspects improved significantly to a more active level. Students became more confident, responsive, and engaged during classroom interaction. They were able to respond to questions, express opinions, collaborate with classmates, and use vocabulary more appropriately during communication activities. These findings suggest that picture word media may have contributed to improvements in vocabulary mastery and encouraged students to participate more actively in communicative learning activities. This is consistent with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction, meaning-focused input, and learner participation as central components of language development (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Nation, 2022). Recent studies also highlight that visual scaffolding improves oral participation by reducing anxiety and increasing access to meaningful vocabulary (Lee & Lee, 2021; Sari & Wulandari, 2023).

The interview findings also support the observation and test results. Before the implementation of picture word media, students tended to be passive, less confident, and reluctant to participate in classroom interaction because they had limited vocabulary knowledge. Many students found English vocabulary difficult to understand and memorize, which reduced their confidence in expressing ideas. However, after the implementation of picture word media, students became more motivated and interested in learning English. The visual representation helped students understand vocabulary more clearly and reduced their anxiety when participating in classroom activities. As a result, students became more confident in speaking, asking questions, answering tasks, and participating in group discussions. The classroom atmosphere also became more interactive, enjoyable, and student-centered. These findings align with affective filter theory, which states that reduced anxiety and increased motivation enhance language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; updated discussion in Nation, 2021). Recent EFL studies further confirm that visual supports significantly reduce speaking anxiety and improve willingness to communicate among learners (Rahmawati et al., 2024; Pham & Nguyen, 2022).

The findings of this study are consistent with several recent studies related to the use of picture-based media in vocabulary learning. Recent research shows that picture-supported instruction improves vocabulary retention by strengthening form-meaning connections and increasing exposure frequency in meaningful contexts (Hidayat & Suryani, 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2023). Other studies also emphasize that visual vocabulary instruction enhances learner autonomy and reduces reliance on translation-based memorization strategies (Utami & Setiawan, 2021; Kim & Kwon, 2023). These findings are consistent with the present study and suggest that visual media can support both receptive and productive vocabulary development. Moreover, multimodal input has been shown to be more effective than text-only instruction in promoting deeper processing of lexical items (Mayer, 2021; Zhang & Chen, 2021).

Although this study has similarities with previous research, it also has its own contribution. Previous studies mostly focused on vocabulary achievement alone, while this study examined both vocabulary mastery and communicative classroom behavior. This study suggests that picture word media may help students memorize vocabulary and encourage them to use vocabulary more actively during classroom communication. This supports current perspectives in vocabulary pedagogy, which emphasize that vocabulary learning should not be isolated memorization but integrated with communicative use and interactional practice (Nation, 2022; Webb & Nation,

2023). In this sense, vocabulary knowledge is not only receptive but also productive, requiring opportunities for meaningful use in classroom discourse.

However, several challenges were also found during the implementation of the research. In the early stage of Cycle I, some students were still passive and hesitant to participate in classroom activities because they lacked confidence in using English vocabulary. In addition, several students required more guidance in understanding instructions and using vocabulary independently. This reflects common challenges in EFL classrooms where limited lexical knowledge restricts learner participation and fluency development (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Nevertheless, after improvements in teaching strategies and more intensive classroom interaction in Cycle II, students gradually became more confident and actively involved in the learning process. This progression is consistent with the cyclical improvement model in Classroom Action Research, where iterative reflection leads to gradual enhancement of teaching effectiveness (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).

Overall, the findings suggest that picture word media were associated with improvements in students' vocabulary mastery, classroom participation, and communication during the implementation of the action research cycles. The use of visual media created a more engaging, interactive, and meaningful learning environment that encouraged students to participate actively during the teaching and learning process. Therefore, picture word media can be considered a pedagogically valuable instructional medium for teaching English vocabulary at the junior high school level. This supports current research trends emphasizing multimodal, visual, and communicative approaches in 21st-century EFL pedagogy (Mayer, 2021; Nation, 2022; Webb & Nation, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the implementation of picture word media was associated with improvements in students' vocabulary mastery and classroom communication among seventh-grade students at SMP Swasta Bukambero. The improvement was reflected in the increase in students' vocabulary test scores from the pre-test to Cycle II where 90% of students successfully achieved the minimum mastery criterion in Cycle II. In addition, students showed improvements in participation, confidence, and interaction during the teaching and learning process. The use of picture word media appeared to support students in understanding and remembering vocabulary through visual representation. The media was also associated with a more engaging learning environment that encouraged greater student participation in classroom activities. This was followed by increased confidence in expressing ideas, answering questions, and interacting with classmates during the learning process. Finally, future researchers are recommended to conduct similar studies in different educational levels, with larger samples, or in different language skills such as speaking, reading, or writing. Future studies may also consider combining picture word media with digital technology or other teaching methods to explore more comprehensive outcomes and contribute to the development of English language teaching strategies.

References

Alderson, J. C., & Banerjee, J. (2022). *Language testing and assessment: An advanced resource book* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Alqahtani, M. (2021). The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. *International Journal of Teaching and Education, 9*(1), 21–34.

Al-Seghayer, K. (2021). *Teaching and learning vocabulary in the second language classroom*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Andriani, D., Sari, N., & Putra, A. (2022). The effectiveness of picture word media on students' vocabulary mastery. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning, 5*(2), 45–56.

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Irvine, C. K. S., & Walker, D. (2019). *Introduction to research in education*. Cengage Learning.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.

Brown, H. D., & Lee, H. (2019). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Pearson.

Burns, A. (2019). *Action research in second language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Çoban Sural, Ü., & Yaşar Sağlık, Z. (2024). *Next-generation learning experience: The effect of technology-assisted and printed context-based vocabulary activities on vocabulary knowledge and learning motivation*. Education and Information Technologies, 29, 20823–20853. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12688-x

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. SAGE Publications.

Derakhshan, A., Fathi, J., & Pawlak, M. (2022). Classroom engagement and language learning: Recent developments and future directions. *Language Teaching Research, 26*(6), 1013–1032.

Dörnyei, Z. (2020). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

Duan, H., Yunus, M. M., & Ismail, H. H. (2025). *Mobile-assisted English vocabulary learning: A systematic review of platforms, learning outcomes, and implications (2019–2025)*. International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research. https://ijlter.net/index.php/journal/article/view/2698

Ellis, R. (2021). *Reflections on task-based language teaching*. Multilingual Matters.

Fauzan, U., & Rohmah, Z. (2023). Visual media and vocabulary learning among Indonesian EFL learners. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 13*(1), 120–132.

Hidayat, R., & Suryani, A. (2022). The effect of picture-based instruction on vocabulary retention in EFL learners. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 7(2), 145–158.

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner*. Deakin University.

Kim, H., & Kwon, Y. (2023). Visual scaffolding and vocabulary acquisition in second language learning. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 35, 55–72.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.

Lee, J., & Lee, H. (2021). Reducing speaking anxiety through visual supports in EFL classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 55(3), 812–830.

Lin, C. C., Liu, G. Z., & Wang, T. I. (2021). Effects of vocabulary learning strategies on language achievement. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 34*(5–6), 768–790.

Liu, T., & Wang, X. (2022). Dual coding theory and vocabulary learning: Cognitive perspectives in second language acquisition. *System*, 108, 102846.
Mayer, R. E. (2021). *Multimedia learning* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
Nation, I. S. P. (2022). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
Nation, I. S. P., & Webb, S. (2023). *Teaching and learning vocabulary* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
Nurhasanah, R. D., Amaliah, M., & Nugraha, D. S. (2026). *The impact of gamified learning platforms on vocabulary acquisition and motivation among EFL learners*. Journal of English Education and Teacher Trainer, 3(1). https://doi.org/10.15575/educater.v3i1.2992
Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. SAGE Publications.
Pham, T. H., & Nguyen, L. T. (2022). Multimodal input and learner engagement in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 3, 100143.
Plass, J. L., & Jones, L. C. (2020). *Multimedia learning and second language acquisition*. The Modern Language Journal, 104(S1), 105–123.
Pratiwi, N., Sari, D., & Wulandari, R. (2023). Visual learning media and vocabulary acquisition in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 14(2), 389–401.
Rahmawati, D., Sari, M., & Wulandari, A. (2024). Visual scaffolding and speaking anxiety reduction in EFL learners. *Asian EFL Journal*, 31(1), 112–128.
Richards, J. C. (2022). *Teaching English through interaction and communication*. Cambridge University Press.
Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
Sari, D. P., & Wulandari, F. (2023). Visual media and oral participation in EFL classrooms. *Journal of English Education and Linguistics*, 10(1), 77–90.
Schmitt, N., & Schmitt, D. (2020). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
Staehr, L. S. (2020). Vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency. *Language Learning Journal, 48*(2), 139–152.
Teng, F. (2023). *Vocabulary learning strategies and foreign language acquisition*. Routledge.
Utami, R., & Setiawan, B. (2021). Reducing translation dependency through visual vocabulary learning. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 233–245.
Webb, S. (2020). The importance of vocabulary knowledge in language learning. *Language Teaching, 53*(1), 1–17.
Webb, S., & Nation, I. S. P. (2023). *How vocabulary is learned* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
Webb, S., & Nation, I. S. P. (2023). *Teaching and learning vocabulary* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
Zhang, D., & Graham, S. (2020). Vocabulary learning and willingness to communicate in EFL contexts. *System, 92*, 102276.
Zhang, R., Zou, D., & Cheng, G. (2024). *Self-regulated digital game-based vocabulary learning: Motivation, application of self-regulated learning strategies, EFL vocabulary knowledge development, and their interplay*. Computer Assisted Language Learning, 38(8), 1961–2003. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2024.2344555
Zhang, X., et al. (2023). *Learner engagement in digital game-based vocabulary learning and its effects on EFL vocabulary development*. System, 119, 103173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103173
Zhang, Y., & Chen, L. (2021). Visual learning and second language vocabulary acquisition: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning Journal*, 49(4), 412–428.