

The Effect of Vocabulary Journal on Students' Vocabulary Mastery at Junior High School

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A B S T R A C T

Vocabulary mastery plays an important role in supporting students' English language proficiency; however, evidence regarding the effectiveness of Vocabulary Journal among junior high school students remains limited. A Vocabulary Journal is a learning tool that encourages students to systematically record new words, their meanings, and example sentences to support vocabulary learning. This study aimed to investigate the effect of Vocabulary Journal on the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 6 Palu. Employing a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design, the study involved 72 students selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected through vocabulary pre-tests and post-tests and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that the experimental group achieved a higher mean post-test score (66.32) than the control group (52.01). Since the data were not normally distributed, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed, yielding a significant difference between the groups ($p = 0.002 < 0.05$). Therefore, Vocabulary Journal can be considered an effective strategy for vocabulary instruction in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Journal; Vocabulary Mastery; Quasi-Experimental Design; EFL Learners; Junior High School Students.*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in language learning because it serves as the foundation of communication and supports language use in various contexts. Dakhi & Fitria (2019) argue that vocabulary not only serves as a means of expressing meaning but also as a reflection of social reality, a driver of emotions, and a predictor of academic achievement. In English language learning, vocabulary is considered a fundamental component that enables learners to understand and use the language effectively. According to Erniwati et al. (2019), vocabulary serves to express meaning and supports receptive skills, including listening and reading, as well as productive skills, including speaking and writing. Therefore, adequate vocabulary mastery is essential for students to develop their language proficiency and communicate successfully in both oral and written forms.

Vocabulary mastery involves more than simply knowing the meanings of words. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge consists of three main aspects: form, meaning, and use. Knowledge of form enables learners to recognize and produce words accurately, while knowledge of meaning helps them understand the concepts represented by those words. In addition, knowledge of use allows learners to apply vocabulary appropriately in different contexts and communicative situations. Therefore, vocabulary mastery requires not only the ability to recognize vocabulary but also the ability to understand and use words accurately and meaningfully in communication.

Effective vocabulary instruction plays an important role in helping students develop their vocabulary knowledge. According to Sudarman et al. (2022), teachers need to support

students' vocabulary development not only by teaching new words but also by introducing vocabulary learning strategies that enable learners to expand their vocabulary knowledge independently. In addition, vocabulary instruction should be integrated with language learning activities so that students have opportunities to encounter and learn new vocabulary while developing their English proficiency. Such an approach can help learners develop both the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge and support their overall language development.

Despite the importance of vocabulary mastery, many Indonesian learners continue to experience difficulties in developing adequate vocabulary knowledge. Nurweni & Read (1999) reported that Indonesian students possessed a limited English vocabulary size, which may hinder their ability to understand English texts independently. More recent evidence indicates that vocabulary learning difficulties remain a significant challenge among Indonesian EFL learners. Students with limited vocabulary knowledge often experience difficulties in understanding, retaining, pronouncing, and using English words effectively (Sitorus & Lubis, 2026). Furthermore, Hartini & Ardini (2024) found a positive correlation between students' vocabulary knowledge and their English competencies, indicating that learners with better vocabulary knowledge tended to achieve better performance in English. These findings highlight the importance of developing students' vocabulary knowledge as an essential component of English language learning.

The challenges related to vocabulary learning are particularly relevant to the context of this study, which focuses on eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 6 Palu. As discussed previously, limited vocabulary knowledge may affect students' English performance and their ability to understand and use English effectively (Hartini & Ardini, 2024). Therefore, supporting students' vocabulary development remains an important concern in English language learning. In this context, appropriate vocabulary instruction and learning strategies are needed to help students expand their vocabulary knowledge and improve their vocabulary mastery (Sudarman et al., 2022).

One strategy that has gained attention in vocabulary learning is the use of vocabulary journals. According to Erniwati et al. (2019), vocabulary journals are learning tools that encourage students to systematically record and reflect on newly encountered words by including information such as definitions, example sentences, and other relevant details. Through this process, learners receive repeated exposure to lexical items and engage in deeper cognitive processing, which may support vocabulary acquisition and retention. Schmitt & Schmitt (1995), further argued that vocabulary journals encourage learners to revisit previously learned words and take greater responsibility for their own vocabulary learning, thereby fostering learner autonomy. Furthermore, vocabulary journals have been reported to support the development of both vocabulary breadth and depth while promoting learner autonomy in vocabulary learning. Empirical evidence also indicates that the use of vocabulary journals can effectively enhance students' vocabulary mastery (Erniwati et al., 2019).

Vocabulary Journals may contribute to vocabulary acquisition because the activities involved in maintaining a journal are closely related to the development of vocabulary knowledge. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge consists of three aspects: form, meaning, and use. When students record newly encountered words in their journals, they focus on recognizing the form of the words and identifying their meanings. Through regular review of previously recorded entries, learners receive repeated exposure to vocabulary items, which may strengthen vocabulary retention. This finding is consistent with Rahmi et al. (2025), who reported that the use of appropriate vocabulary learning strategies supports vocabulary retention and facilitates vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. Furthermore, when students use the target words in example sentences, they develop a better understanding of how words function in meaningful contexts. This process is consistent with the stages of recording, reviewing, and using proposed by Turnuk (2018), which encourage learners to engage actively with vocabulary rather than simply memorizing word lists. Therefore, Vocabulary Journals provide opportunities for deeper cognitive processing and repeated engagement with vocabulary, which may facilitate vocabulary acquisition and improve

students' vocabulary mastery. This argument is further supported by Erniwati et al. (2026), who concluded that vocabulary journals promote vocabulary acquisition through deeper cognitive engagement, repeated exposure, and learner autonomy.

Several previous studies have examined the use of vocabulary journals in English language learning. Erniwati et al. (2019) found that the use of vocabulary journals was effective in enhancing the vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at SMPN 18 Palu. Similarly, Purwati (2022) reported a significant influence of vocabulary journal strategy on students' vocabulary mastery among ninth-grade students at SMPN 5 Bandar Lampung. In addition, Turnuk (2018) reported that vocabulary journals supported vocabulary learning by encouraging repeated engagement with target words and fostering learner autonomy. The study also emphasized that systematic vocabulary recording could provide meaningful opportunities for learners to organize, review, and use newly learned vocabulary. These findings suggest that vocabulary journals have considerable potential to support vocabulary learning and vocabulary mastery in EFL classrooms.

Although previous studies have reported positive findings regarding the use of vocabulary journals (Erniwati et al., 2019; Purwati, 2022; Turnuk, 2018), the implementation of this strategy has been examined in relatively limited educational settings. Moreover, evidence regarding its effectiveness among eighth-grade students in junior high school contexts remains scarce. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate whether the use of vocabulary journals can effectively improve students' vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 6 Palu.

Based on the research gap identified above, this study aims to investigate the effect of Vocabulary Journal on students' vocabulary mastery. Specifically, this study examines whether the use of Vocabulary Journal has a significant effect on the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 6 Palu.

METHODE

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group design. A quasi-experimental design is appropriate when researchers cannot randomly assign participants to experimental and control groups because the classes or groups have already been established (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2023). The study involved an experimental group and a control group without random assignment because the classes had already been formed by the school. Both groups were administered a pre-test and a post-test to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after the treatment. The experimental group received instruction through the use of Vocabulary Journal, while the control group was taught using conventional teaching methods. The effectiveness of the Vocabulary Journal was determined by examining the difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups after the treatment (Sugiyono, 2020).

Participants

The population of this study consisted of all eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 6 Palu in the 2024/2025 academic year, comprising 294 students distributed across eight classes. The sample was selected using cluster random sampling because the students were organized into intact classes and random assignment of individual students was not feasible. Two classes were selected as the sample of the study. Advanced class, consisting of 36 students, was assigned as the experimental group and received instruction through Vocabulary Journal. Meanwhile, the Merdeka class, consisting of 36 students, was assigned as the control group and received conventional instruction. Therefore, the total number of participants involved in this study was 72 students.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a vocabulary test administered as both a pre-test and a post-test to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after the treatment. The test focused on three aspects of vocabulary mastery, namely form, meaning, and use, based on the framework proposed by Nation (2001). It consisted of 25 items, including 15 multiple-choice items, 5 sentence completion items, and 5 sentence construction items. The multiple-choice and sentence completion items assessed students' understanding of vocabulary form and meaning, while the sentence construction items measured their ability to use vocabulary appropriately in context.

The instrument was developed by the researcher based on the objectives of the study and the indicators of vocabulary mastery, namely form, meaning, and use, as proposed by Nation (2001). Prior to its administration, the instrument was validated through expert judgment involving the research supervisor and an English teacher at SMP Negeri 6 Palu to ensure the appropriateness of the test content, the clarity of the instructions, and its alignment with the research objectives. Feedback obtained from the validators was used to revise and improve the test items before they were administered to the participants.

To ensure consistency in scoring, objective scoring procedures were applied to the multiple-choice and sentence completion items, with each correct answer receiving one point and each incorrect answer receiving zero points. The sentence construction items were assessed using a scoring rubric adapted from Weigle (2002), which provided clear criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of word use, grammatical accuracy, and sentence comprehensibility. The rubric was applied consistently throughout the assessment process to support reliable scoring of students' responses.

Table 1 Scoring Rubric of Sentence Construction

Score	Criteria
4	The sentence is grammatically correct and uses the target word accurately and appropriately in context.
3	The sentence uses the target word correctly with minor grammatical errors that do not affect meaning.
2	The sentence shows incorrect use of the target word or unclear meaning.
1	The sentence is poorly constructed and does not demonstrate understanding of the target word.
0	No response or irrelevant answer.

Source: Weigle (2002)

Procedures

The study was conducted in three stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. First, both the experimental and control groups were administered a pre-test to measure their initial vocabulary mastery. After the pre-test, the experimental group received instruction through Vocabulary Journal activities, while the control group received conventional vocabulary instruction. The treatment was conducted in six meetings, each lasting 2×40 minutes. During the treatment, students read short texts related to the lesson topics and identified target vocabulary items, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

They determined the meanings of the words using dictionaries and recorded the vocabulary items in their Vocabulary Journals. Students then constructed simple sentences using the target words and received feedback from the teacher regarding word meaning, word class, and word use. After the treatment period, both groups were administered a post-test using the same test format as the pre-test to measure students' vocabulary mastery after the intervention.

The treatment activities followed three stages: pre-activities, while-activities, and post-activities. During the pre-activities, students were introduced to the lesson topic and the use of Vocabulary Journals. In the while-activities, students read short texts, identified target vocabulary items (nouns, verbs, and adjectives), discussed word meanings, recorded vocabulary entries in their journals, and constructed simple sentences using the target words. During the post-activities, students reviewed their journal entries, received feedback from the teacher, and participated in vocabulary review activities. The treatment was implemented

over six meetings covering the topics of School Life, Daily Activities, My Family, My Friends, School Environment, and Review.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize students' post-test scores in both the experimental and control groups. Prior to hypothesis testing, the normality of the post-test scores was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test. If the significance value was greater than 0.05, the data were considered normally distributed. Since the data did not meet the assumption of normality, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to determine whether there was a significant difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups after the treatment. A significance level of 0.05 was used as the criterion for statistical decision-making. Data processing and statistical analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the effect of Vocabulary Journal on students' vocabulary mastery. The findings include descriptive statistics, normality testing, and hypothesis testing using the Mann-Whitney U test.

To provide an overview of students' vocabulary mastery after the treatment, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted using the post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups. The analyses included the calculation of the mean and standard deviation to describe students' performance before proceeding to further statistical testing.

Table 2. Post-test Scores of the Experimental Group

No	Initials Name	Post-test Score
1	AM	52,5
2	AD	57,5
3	ASSF	62,5
4	ARL	72,5
5	AA	70
6	AD	55
7	AK	67,5
8	CA	60
9	CC	82,5
10	DA	30
11	DS	77,5
12	FS	67,5
13	GP	75
14	GT	62,5
15	GR	75
16	GN	65
17	GJ	62,5
18	GBA	60
19	JFA	82,5
20	JAP	70
21	LZ	67,5
22	MR	67,5
23	MR	75
24	MH	82,5
25	NA	70
26	NN	65

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27	RS	87,5
28	RJ	77,5
29	RPK	52,5
30	RFD	67,5
31	SP	52,5
32	SK	60
33	SW	40
34	SVT	80
35	VP	65
36	YN	70

Table 3. Post-test Scores of the Control Group

No	Initials Name	Post-test Score
1	AH	45
2	ASM	47,5
3	AI	50
4	AIS	40
5	AF	57,5
6	CH	52,5
7	D	55
8	DI	45
9	DJR	45
10	DL	55
11	FR	57,5
12	IF	35
13	IA	60
14	JA	22,5
15	JP	37,5
16	KS	52,5
17	KFM	60
18	WDA	65
19	MNH	60
20	MTR	45
21	MI	65
22	ND	57,5
23	NFD	42,5
24	RM	57,5
25	RM	37,5
26	RFA	50
27	RD	67,5
28	SW	62,5
29	ST	60
30	SL	50
31	SN	72,5
32	TR	57,5
33	TF	55
34	VP	55
35	YM	30

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the effect of Vocabulary Journal on students' vocabulary mastery. Based on the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups, differences in students' vocabulary mastery were observed after the implementation of the treatment. Students in the experimental group, who learned through Vocabulary Journal activities, generally obtained higher scores than those in the control group who received conventional instruction.

The post-test scores of the experimental group ranged from 30 to 87.5, while those of the control group ranged from 22.5 to 72.5. These results indicate variations in students' vocabulary mastery in both groups following the learning process. The higher range of scores achieved by the experimental group suggests that the use of Vocabulary Journal may have contributed positively to students' vocabulary learning outcomes. However, descriptive results alone were insufficient to determine whether the observed difference between the two groups was statistically significant.

To provide a clearer description of students' performance, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted by calculating the mean and standard deviation of the post-test scores. Furthermore, inferential statistical analyses were performed to determine whether the difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant.

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To provide a clearer comparison of student's performance in both groups, the descriptive statistics of the post-test scores are presented in Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Median	Std.Deviation
Experimental	36	66,32	67,50	18,68
Control	36	52,01	55.00	9,93

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of the post-test scores for both groups. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 66.32, a median score of 67.50, and a standard deviation of 18.68. Meanwhile, the control group obtained a mean score of 52.01, a median score of 55.00, and a standard deviation of 9.93. The higher mean and median scores of the experimental group indicate that students who learned through Vocabulary Journals achieved better vocabulary mastery than those who received conventional instruction. Furthermore, the difference in mean scores between the two groups (14.31 points) suggests a noticeable advantage for the experimental group after the treatment. These descriptive results provide initial evidence that the use of Vocabulary Journals may contribute positively to students' vocabulary mastery.

To facilitate the interpretation of the descriptive statistics presented in Table 3, Figure 1 illustrates the comparison of the mean post-test scores between the experimental and control groups.

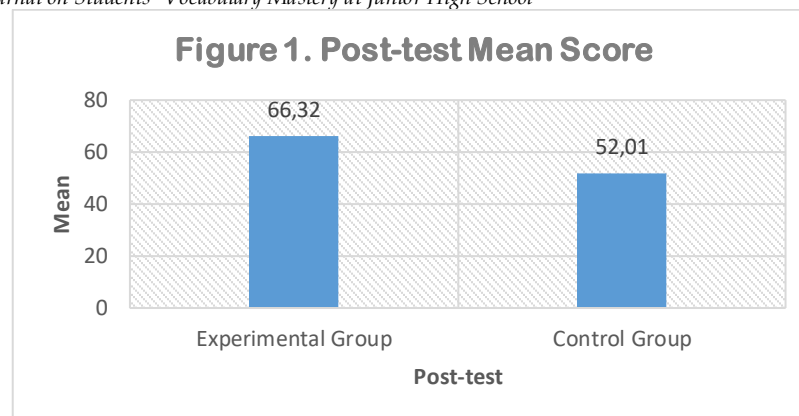


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the difference in mean post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group achieved a higher mean score (66.32) than the control group (52.01), indicating better vocabulary mastery among students who learned through Vocabulary Journals. This visual comparison supports the descriptive statistics presented in Table 4.

Test of Normality

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Group	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Score	Experimental	.304	36	<.001	.786	36	<.001
	Control	.352	36	<.001	.753	36	<.000

Before conducting hypothesis testing, a normality test was performed to determine whether the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups were normally distributed. The normality test was conducted using both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, as presented in Table 4. However, because the number of participants in each group was fewer than 50 students ($n = 36$), the Shapiro-Wilk test was used as the primary basis for interpreting the normality of the data.

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that the experimental group obtained a significance value of less than 0.001, while the control group also obtained a significance value of less than 0.001. According to the decision criteria, data are considered normally distributed if the significance value is greater than 0.05. Conversely, if the significance value is lower than 0.05, the data are considered not normally distributed.

Since the significance values of both groups were lower than the predetermined significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups were not normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality required for parametric tests was not fulfilled. As a consequence, a non-parametric statistical test, namely the Mann-Whitney U test, was employed to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in vocabulary mastery between students who were taught using Vocabulary Journal and those who received conventional instruction.

Hypothesis Testing

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Score	Experimental	36	44.21	1591.50
	Control	36	28.79	1036.50
	Total	72		

Tabel 7 Test Statistics^a

	Score
Mann-Whitney U	370.500
Wilcoxon W	1036.500
Z	-3.132
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.002

Tables 6 and 7 present the results of the Mann–Whitney U test conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups after the treatment. Table 6 shows that the experimental group obtained a mean rank of 44.21 with a sum of ranks of 1591.50, whereas the control group obtained a mean rank of 28.79 with a sum of ranks of 1036.50. The higher mean rank achieved by the experimental group indicates that students who were taught using Vocabulary Journal generally demonstrated better post-test performance than those who received conventional instruction.

Furthermore, Table 6 presents the statistical results of the Mann–Whitney U test. The analysis yielded a Mann–Whitney U value of 370.500, a Wilcoxon W value of 1036.500, and a Z value of -3.132. The significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) was 0.002. According to the decision criteria, the null hypothesis is rejected if the significance value is lower than the predetermined significance level of 0.05. Since the obtained significance value was lower than 0.05 ($0.002 < 0.05$), the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted.

These findings indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in vocabulary mastery between students who were taught using Vocabulary Journal and those who received conventional instruction. Students in the experimental group tended to achieve higher vocabulary mastery than those in the control group. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of Vocabulary Journal had a statistically significant positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery at SMP Negeri 6 Palu.

The findings of this study suggest that the positive effect of Vocabulary Journal may be attributed to the learning activities involved in its implementation. During the treatment sessions, students were required to identify unfamiliar words from reading texts, determine their meanings using dictionaries, record the vocabulary items systematically in their journals, and construct sentences using the target words. These activities encouraged students to engage actively with newly encountered vocabulary rather than merely memorizing word meanings. This finding is consistent with Nation (2001) framework, which emphasizes that vocabulary mastery involves knowledge of form, meaning, and use. Through maintaining Vocabulary Journals, students had opportunities to recognize and record word forms accurately, understand the meanings of the words they encountered, and apply the vocabulary appropriately in meaningful contexts through sentence construction activities. The findings also support Erniwati et al. (2026), who argued that repeated exposure and deeper cognitive processing promoted through vocabulary journals contribute to vocabulary acquisition and retention. By revisiting vocabulary entries and reflecting on previously learned words, students were encouraged to process lexical information more actively and meaningfully. Similarly, Turnuk (2018) emphasized that systematic vocabulary recording and review provide meaningful opportunities for learners to organize, revisit, and use newly acquired vocabulary. Therefore, the implementation of Vocabulary Journal not only facilitated students' vocabulary learning processes but also contributed to the improvement of their vocabulary mastery.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effect of Vocabulary Journal on the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at a junior high school. The findings revealed that students taught using Vocabulary Journal achieved significantly higher vocabulary mastery than those receiving conventional instruction. The Mann–Whitney U test produced a significance value of 0.002, confirming that Vocabulary Journal had a statistically significant positive effect on students'

vocabulary learning. Through this strategy, students actively identified unfamiliar words, recorded vocabulary systematically, reviewed previously learned items, and applied new words in meaningful sentences. These activities supported the development of students' knowledge of word form, meaning, and usage while encouraging active engagement in the learning process. The findings suggest that Vocabulary Journal is an effective alternative strategy for vocabulary instruction in EFL classrooms, particularly at the junior high school level. Pedagogically, English teachers are encouraged to integrate Vocabulary Journal into classroom practice to promote systematic vocabulary learning, active participation, and learner autonomy. Future research should examine its effectiveness across diverse educational contexts, larger samples, and longer intervention periods to strengthen evidence of its impact.

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