

# The Use of Illustrated Books to Increase Elementary Students' English Vocabulary

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses the persistent challenge of limited English vocabulary among elementary students, which often hinders their ability to understand and communicate effectively. Many young learners struggle to retain new words when taught through traditional methods lacking engaging visual stimuli. The objective of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of illustrated books in improving vocabulary mastery among elementary school students. A total of 20 students participated in the study. The research applied a pre-test-post-test design. Before the intervention, students took a pre-test that measured their vocabulary knowledge, scoring an average of 20%. They were exposed to illustrated books designed to present target vocabulary through images. At the end of the program, a post-test was administered to assess improvement. The findings revealed a significant increase in students' vocabulary scores, from 20% in the pre-test to 75% in the post-test. This result indicates that illustrated books provided strong visual support and contextual clues, enabling better comprehension and retention of new words. In conclusion, illustrated books can be an effective tool to enhance vocabulary acquisition among elementary students, making English learning more engaging, memorable, and accessible.

**Keywords:** [illustrated books](#), [vocabulary acquisition](#), [elementary students](#), [english language learning](#), [visual aids](#)

## INTRODUCTION

English vocabulary mastery plays a fundamental role in supporting young learners' ability to comprehend texts, engage in communication, and develop broader language skills [1]. However, in many Indonesian elementary schools, vocabulary instruction remains limited to rote memorization and mechanical translation, which often fails to engage students or promote long-term retention [2]. In the partner school community, teachers reported that students exhibited low vocabulary mastery, with limited exposure to meaningful contexts and minimal visual learning resources. This challenge was reflected in the initial pre-test results, where the average vocabulary score was only 20%.

One of the main challenges faced by the community is the lack of appealing and context-rich learning materials that match the cognitive development of young learners [3]. In many cases, teaching resources consist only of word lists and isolated definitions without visual or contextual support. This leads to low motivation and limited understanding, as learners are unable to connect new words with real-life situations. For the partner school, this issue is compounded by the limited availability of books with appropriate language levels and engaging illustrations. Therefore, there is a clear need for innovative strategies to bridge the gap between vocabulary input and meaningful learning experiences.

Illustrated books, which combine visual stimuli with contextual storytelling, have been shown to enhance vocabulary learning by fostering better word-image association and improving motivation [4]. They provide learners with concrete visual cues, helping them remember and understand words more effectively. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, visual aids have been proven to reduce cognitive load, maintain learners' attention, and promote better retention of target vocabulary [5]. Furthermore, illustrated books can cater to different learning styles, benefiting visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners simultaneously.

The objective of this community service activity was to design and implement an English vocabulary learning program using illustrated books to improve elementary students' vocabulary mastery. This approach was expected to address the identified learning gaps, increase engagement, and provide teachers with alternative strategies for more effective vocabulary instruction. By integrating insights from previous studies and adapting them to the local school context, the program aimed to produce measurable improvement in students' vocabulary performance, as indicated by the substantial increase from pre-test to post-test scores.

## IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This community service activity applied a pre-test-post-test design to examine the effectiveness of illustrated books in improving English vocabulary

mastery among elementary school students. The program was delivered through a series of structured learning sessions at the partner school, which had previously identified low vocabulary proficiency as a significant challenge. Twenty students from grades 1, aged 6–7 years, participated based on teacher recommendations and initial assessment results. Parental consent and school approval were obtained prior to the activity.

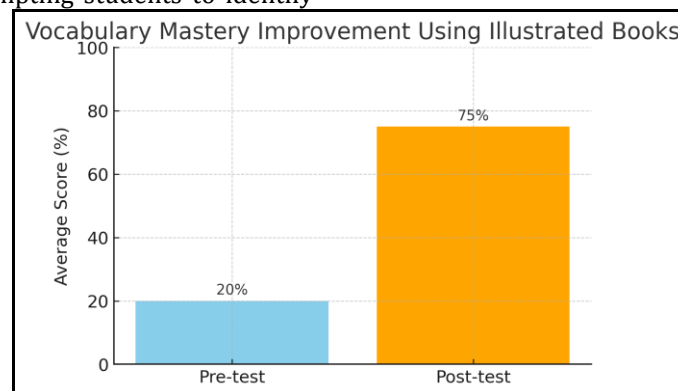
The learning materials consisted of carefully selected illustrated books containing thematic vocabulary, such as body and school objects. Each book was designed with clear visual cues and simple contextual sentences to facilitate comprehension. Supplementary materials, including vocabulary worksheets and interactive games, were developed to reinforce learning and encourage active participation.

The program began with a pre-test to measure students' initial vocabulary knowledge. During the sessions, teachers conducted guided reading while displaying illustrations, prompting students to identify

and repeat new words, and leading brief discussions. Activities such as matching games and drawing tasks were integrated to strengthen word-meaning associations. A post-test, using the same vocabulary set, was administered to measure improvement, and results were analyzed quantitatively to determine score gains, supplemented by qualitative observations on student engagement.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the pre-test and post-test indicated a substantial improvement in students' English vocabulary mastery after participating in the illustrated book learning program. As shown in the figure, the average pre-test score was 20%, reflecting limited vocabulary knowledge prior to the intervention. After the series of illustrated book sessions, the average post-test score increased to 75%, marking a 55-point gain in performance. This result demonstrates that the integration of visual and contextual learning materials had a strong positive effect on students' ability to acquire and retain new words.



**Figure 1.** Table Improvement

The improvement can be attributed to the role of illustrations in creating a stronger mental association between words and their meanings. According to Wright [5], pictures provide concrete references that make abstract words more understandable, especially for young learners. Similarly, Elley [4] found that contextualized stories with visuals improve vocabulary retention by offering repeated exposure and meaningful usage of target words. In this program, the combination of visual cues, storytelling, and interactive activities allowed learners to process and recall new vocabulary more effectively.

These findings are consistent with prior studies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, which highlight that multimodal input—combining verbal and visual elements—reduces cognitive load and maintains learner engagement [6]. The presence of illustrations

not only aids comprehension but also stimulates curiosity and imagination, factors that contribute to a deeper connection with the learning material [7]. Such engagement is essential for sustaining motivation in language learning, particularly among elementary school students who often have shorter attention spans.

Another contributing factor to the success of the program was the incorporation of interactive activities alongside illustrated book reading. According to Cameron [3], young learners benefit greatly from tasks that require them to actively manipulate language, such as matching games, drawing, and role-playing. These activities encourage repeated use of new vocabulary in varied contexts, which strengthens memory retention. In the partner school, students were observed to be more enthusiastic and collaborative during these sessions compared to traditional vocabulary drills.



**Figure 2.** The Process of Interactive Activities

In addition, the social dimension of the learning environment appeared to play a key role. Vygotskian theory suggests that language acquisition is enhanced through social interaction and scaffolding provided by teachers and peers [8]. During the program, teacher facilitation ensured that students received immediate feedback and guidance, while peer collaboration fostered a sense of shared achievement. These conditions align with research indicating that cooperative learning environments can boost vocabulary gains and confidence in language use [9].

Finally, the findings from this program align with the growing body of literature advocating for visually rich and context-based approaches to language instruction. While traditional methods relying heavily on memorization may yield limited results, illustrated books provide a multisensory learning experience that caters to different learning styles and developmental needs [1]. For the partner school, this approach offers a sustainable and replicable model for vocabulary instruction that can be adapted to other language skills in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of illustrated books as a learning medium proved highly effective in improving elementary students' English vocabulary mastery. The program resulted in a significant increase in average scores, from 20% in the pre-test to 75% in the post-test, indicating substantial vocabulary gains. This improvement can be attributed to the integration of visual cues, contextual storytelling, and interactive activities, which together enhanced students' comprehension, retention, and engagement.

The results align with previous studies emphasizing the value of visual support and meaningful contexts in language learning. Illustrated books provided a multisensory learning experience that accommodated diverse learning styles, maintained student motivation, and facilitated deeper word-meaning associations. Furthermore, the collaborative classroom environment fostered peer learning and encouraged active participation, contributing to the overall success of the program.

Given these findings, illustrated books can be recommended as an effective, low-cost, and replicable strategy for teaching vocabulary in elementary schools,

especially in EFL contexts. For sustainable impact, schools should integrate such visual and context-based approaches into their regular English curriculum, and further exploration should be conducted to examine their effectiveness in developing other language skills such as reading comprehension, speaking, and writing.

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