Word Search-WordWall to Improve Students' Vocabulary at SMPT Al-Madani, Cikarang Utara, Bekasi

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This classroom action research investigates the effectiveness of Word Search games on the Wordwall platform in enhancing English vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMPT Al-Madani, Cikarang Utara, Bekasi. The research was conducted over two cycles, each comprising four stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. A pre-cycle observation revealed that only 25% of students demonstrated adequate vocabulary mastery. In Cycle 1, the introduction of Word Search activities via digital projection increased student completion rates to 65%, while Cycle 2, which incorporated collaborative group work and printed worksheets, resulted in a 95% completion rate. The gamified learning environment significantly boosted student engagement, motivation, and interaction. The findings suggest that Wordwall's interactive features support vocabulary acquisition by integrating reading, writing, pronunciation, and comprehension tasks in a playful format. The results affirm that Word Search games can serve as effective tools for promoting vocabulary mastery and learner autonomy in EFL classrooms and is recommended to replicate to other settings. *This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon that English is an international language makes people from around the world aware to master the language. In the Indonesian case, students from elementary school through college are encourage to learn English. The ability to communicate effectively in English is crucial for bridging gaps in education. Thus, mastering English will enable students to compete in a better and more necessary educational environment of the future (Dzakwan et al., 2023).

English is a language that is much in demand, both in terms of economic and political education, especially in the era of globalization, where English has become a major reference for someone to convey their ideas. Therefore, English is a skill for students to make them more updated and competitive. Apart from that, teaching English is the main focus, especially in improving vocabulary. Teaching vocabulary is very basic in teaching English and is crucial to master the language (Holidazia & Rodliyah, 2020). However, many students still struggle to expand their vocabulary, although they realize that it is the bridge to comprehend texts, express their ideas, and communicate effectively. Without a rich vocabulary, it's almost impossible to develop strong reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills (Susanti, 2019).

When teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it's important that vocabulary is introduced in an engaging and enjoyable way. Traditional methods like rote memorization or teacher-led drills often fail to capture students' attention, particularly in junior high school where the demands of learning are higher. Teachers are increasingly turning to digital media and gamified learning environments to create more interactive and student-driven experiences.

Digital media is increasingly used in language teaching, one of which is the Wordwall platform, which provides teachers with customizable game templates like Word Search, Match-Up, and Quiz. However, the use of Classroom Action Research (CAR), a method that involves continuous improvement through reflection, is rarely applied to digital platforms like Wordwall. This study aims to fill that gap.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate how effectively Word Search games on Wordwall enhance vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMPT Al-Madani Cikarang Utara. The study also investigates whether using digital media in a game-based format improves student participation and classroom interactions. The research questions are as follows:
1. Does using Word Search games on WordWall improve students' vocabulary learning?
2. How does this digital media affect student engagement and classroom interactions?

This paper fits within the genre of Classroom Action Research (CAR) and explores the impact of Wordwall on vocabulary learning, reflecting on how the teaching process is adapted. I hope hope the results of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on gamified learning and provide valuable insights for EFL teachers in Indonesia looking for innovative ways to improve vocabulary teaching.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a synthesis of relevant literature concerning vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts, the role of gamification in language learning, and the pedagogical application of digital media such as Wordwall. The review aims to position the current study within the broader field of English language teaching and identify gaps that justify the research focus.

2.1. English Vocabulary

Vocabulary is widely recognized as a core component of language proficiency. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge encompasses both receptive and productive dimensions, which are essential for reading comprehension, writing fluency, and oral communication. In EFL settings, learners often face challenges in acquiring sufficient vocabulary due to limited exposure and lack of contextual use. Susanti (2019) argues that vocabulary mastery is a critical learning condition that requires deliberate, systematic teaching, as not all words are learned naturally in context.

Traditional methods of vocabulary instruction, such as memorization or translation, have been criticized as ineffective for second language learners. Holidazia and Rodliyah (2020) suggest that strategies like context-based guessing, visual aids, and communicative activities are more beneficial. These strategies align with the shift towards learner-centered pedagogy in modern language teaching.

2.2. Gamification as Teaching Media

Gamification refers to the integration of game-like elements—such as points, levels, and challenges—into non-game contexts to enhance motivation and engagement (Deterding et al., 2011, Arnesti & Hamid, 2015). In education, gamified tools have shown promise in increasing student participation and improving learning outcomes. One of the online media that can be used by teachers is Word Wall. The word wall itself has 18 templates with open access. With these various templates, we can choose whatever is suitable for our context to make interactive and interesting classroom

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activities. Purwitasari (2022) found that Wordwall significantly improved student performance in mathematics, suggesting its cross-disciplinary potential. In the context of English language teaching, Novalia et al. (2019) demonstrated that Wordwall enhanced vocabulary achievement among junior high school students, attributing success to its visual appeal and ease of use. These findings support the notion that digital media can transform passive learning environments into dynamic and student-centered spaces. In other words, using WordWall is an effective learning strategy to create a more appropriate and meanaingful classroom activities (Syahputra, 2014).

However, the effectiveness of gamified media in vocabulary instruction remains underexplored in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Most studies focus on general digital literacy or grammar instruction, leaving a gap in understanding how tools like Wordwall impact vocabulary acquisition specifically. Prihatmi (2017) once argued that writing and speaking are skills that really require mastery of a broad vocabulary. Thus, the use of WordWall could be signified as a solution not only for vocabulary learning but also for other micro skills like speaking and writing.

2.3. Classroom Action Research and Pedagogical Implementation

Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a reflective process that allows educators to assess and improve their own teaching methods. The process consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, and it encourages teachers to make continuous adjustments based on feedback. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) developed this cyclical process, which is particularly valuable in evaluating the effectiveness of teaching strategies over time. Mawardi (2014) highlights the value of CAR in empowering educators to respond to classroom challenges and adapt strategies based on student needs.

CAR provides a systematic approach for evaluating the impact of teaching tools, such as gamified media, on student engagement and learning. Though there has been limited CAR research on gamified vocabulary instruction in junior high schools, this study aims to fill that gap by assessing the use of Wordwall's Word Search game in enhancing vocabulary mastery. In addition the employment of CAR for classroom learning enables teacher to assess learner behavior and refine teaching methods accordingly through observation (Haryati, et al, 2022). Despite its relevance, few studies have applied CAR to examine gamified vocabulary instruction using Wordwall, particularly in junior high school settings.

3. METHOD

This section discussed the methods of the study, covering settings, participants, data collection tools and methods of analysis.

3.1. Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at SMPT Al-Madani in Cikarang Utara, Bekasi, where students come from various socio-economic backgrounds. Given the school's limited access to advanced technological resources, Wordwall was chosen as an accessible digital tool. This study involved 20 eighth-grade students who based on researcher's observation face challenges with vocabulary acquisition. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, and consent was obtained from both the school administrator and supervising teacher.

The first cycle was conducted in November 2024, and the second one was held the following week. Each cycle was conducted in one meeting. Each cycle consists of planning, observation, implementation, and reflection.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

Multiple data sources were used for triangulation to ensure reliability they are:

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1. Observation Sheets: These recorded students' behaviours, attention, and interaction during lessons. As the basic research instrument, Observation process enables the researcher to notice phenomena, collect evidence and make sense of the world.
2. Vocabulary Mastery Test: A test given at the end of each cycle to track students' progress. The test helps researchers understand students' language proficiency. More specifically it provides data on how many words a learner knows, how he acquires them, and the relationship between acquisition and the efficacy of the language. Data from tests is used to evaluate learning progress and develop effective teaching strategies.
3. Student Worksheets: Word Search exercises were used to assess students' recognition and use of vocabulary. The exercise is a platform that facilitates students' learning and skill development, so the worksheet allows the researcher to assess comprehension and track students' improvements.
4. Teacher Reflection Journals: Reflections on the classroom teaching process and observations. Reflection journal is a crucial tool to develop both researchers' and learners' self-awareness, analyze learning process, enhance writing skills and improve pedagogical practices. Journal helps researchers to reflect and scrutinize their own biases for a more professional perspective of research journey.

3.3. Technique of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to compare vocabulary test and worksheet scores between cycles. This allowed the researcher to track students' progress over time. Qualitative data from observation sheets and teacher journals were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in student engagement, enthusiasm, and interaction.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

At the pre-cycle stage, the researcher observed the events and teaching and learning processes. The results showed that the learning carried out by teachers is passive and tends to be teacher-centered. Students appear to be inactive during the class. In this case, teachers use less media, which makes students lose their enthusiasm for learning. In terms of practice sessions, students appeared to be less able to comprehend or use the learnt vocabulary, which contributes to low participation in practice.

During cycle 1, the teacher starts the initial activity, which begins with greetings and providing motivation to students in order to improve their enthusiasm for learning. The teacher conducts the main activity by using word search media on the word wall. After the teacher introduces the material, she explains how to use Word Search on the word wall. The teacher then starts giving questions that she has made in the application and asks students to find the meaning and location of the vocabulary intended in the word wall. The teacher closes the activity with appreciation and greetings.

In cycle 2, as usual, the teacher greets and encourages students in class. And continued with the core learning activities by dividing students into 5 groups. Students' task was to discuss the word search game on the projector or Infocus, which was previously prepared by the teacher. After that, the teacher distributes student assignment sheets containing word search games that have been printed on paper, and students are asked to fill in the paper with the instructions listed. Students perform the activity in a group. In the last activity, students collect their work for marking. To close the class, the teacher appreciates and motivates students to be more engaged.

4.1.1. Vocabulary Mastery Progression

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The overall result shows that students' vocabulary mastery improved throughout the study. As can be seen in table 1, there was a significant increase in the number of students who met or even exceeded the minimum competency level (KKM) from one cycle to another. In the pre-cycle, only 5 out of 20 students (25%) were able to reach the KKM, which means most of them still struggled with vocabulary and had difficulty understanding the given tasks.
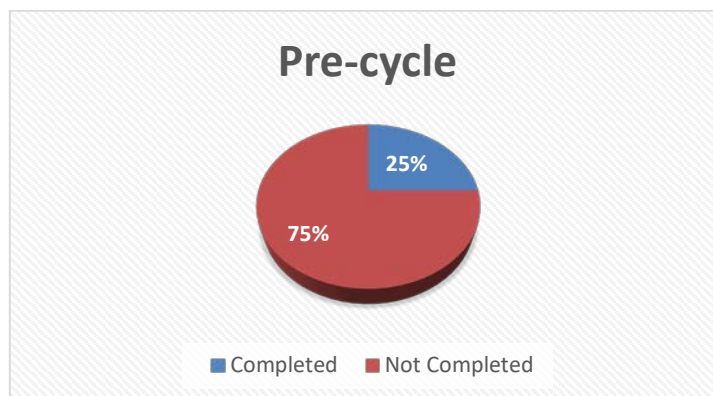

Figure 1. Students' completion participation in pre-cycle.

Figure 1 indicates that there are many students who are not optimal in the learning process in class. 75% of them are quite passive that might caused by the ordinary or minimum learning media used. Meanwhile, only 25% of students who completed the task.
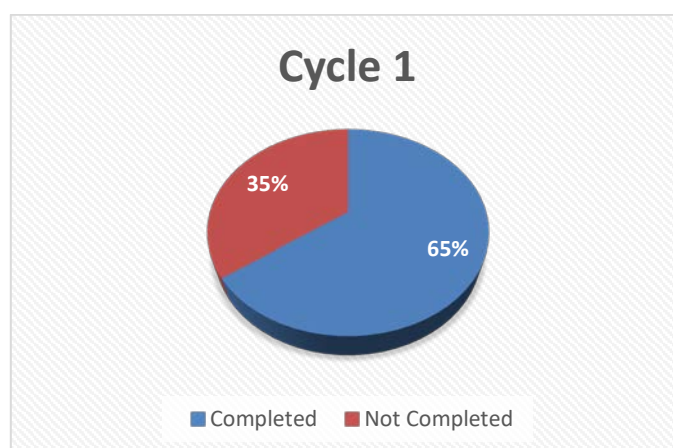

Figure 2. Students' completion participation in cycle 1.

The result of learning after using WordWall can be seen in Figure 2. It is suggested that better learning completion is obtained. This indicates that the use of appropriate teaching media and the selection of strategies could increase students' enthusiasm and interest in learning. This positive trend leads to vocabulary improvements by 65% which is equivalent to 13 students. Thease students managed to pass the KKM. During this stage, students became more familiar with the words through the Word Search activities and started to enjoy the learning process. They were more active in asking the meaning of new words and sometimes even helped their friends to find the answers. The researcher noticed that their confidence also started to grow little by little. However, also at this stage, 7 students, or 35% of them, did not complete the task. Therefore, the researcher continues the study to the next stage, namely the 2nd cycle.

By the second cycle, the improvement became even more visible. Nineteen students (95%) successfully achieved the KKM. Only one student still had difficulties, mostly due to limited attention during the lesson. In general, the class atmosphere was more positive, and students seemed

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more motivated to learn vocabulary. The improvement is also shown clearly in the graph below, which illustrates the upward trend of students' vocabulary mastery across the cycles.
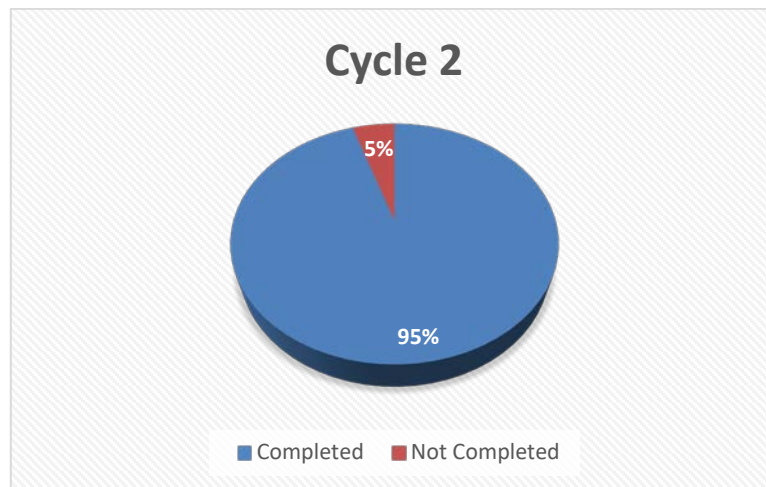

Figure 3. Students' completion participation in cycle 2.

The overall result shows that students' vocabulary mastery improved throughout the study. Table 1 shows the percentage of students who met or exceeded the minimum competency level (KKM) in each cycle.

Table 1. Vocabulary Mastery Across Cycles

Cycle	Number of students Completed	Percentage Completed
Pre-Cycle	5 out of 20	25%
Cycle 1	15 out of 20	65%
Cycle 2	19 out of 20	95%

The improvement is further illustrated in the graph below, showing the upward trend in vocabulary mastery.
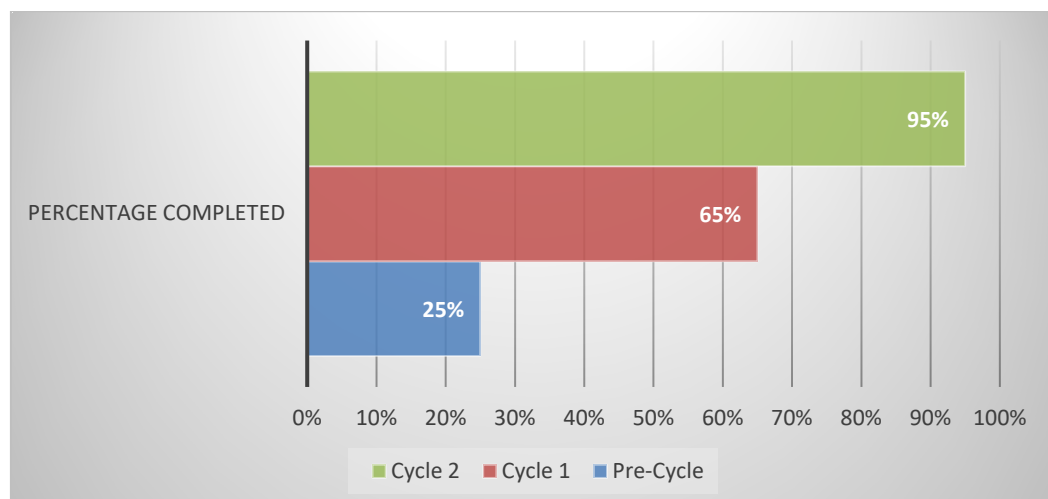

Figure 4. Vocabulary Mastery Progression

The data indicate that the use of Word Search games on Wordwall contributed to a substantial increase in vocabulary acquisition. The interactive and gamified format allowed students

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to engage with vocabulary in a meaningful and enjoyable way. It helps them learn new words, improve spelling, and understand meaning in a fun and interactive way.

4.1.2.   Student Engagement and Enthusiasm

Student engagement measured through classroom observations. The following table presents the percentage of students who demonstrated enthusiasm during each cycle.
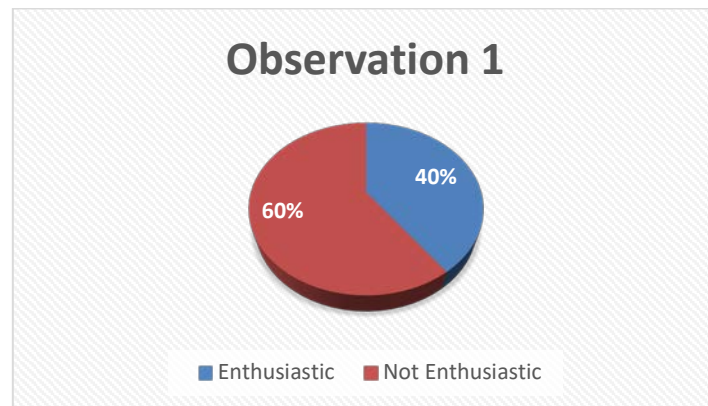

Figure 5. Students' engagement in observation 1.

The diagram explains that some students show regular enthusiasm for learning. Interestingly, 60% of them appeared to be less enthusiastic. Further observation in cycle 2 displayed below.
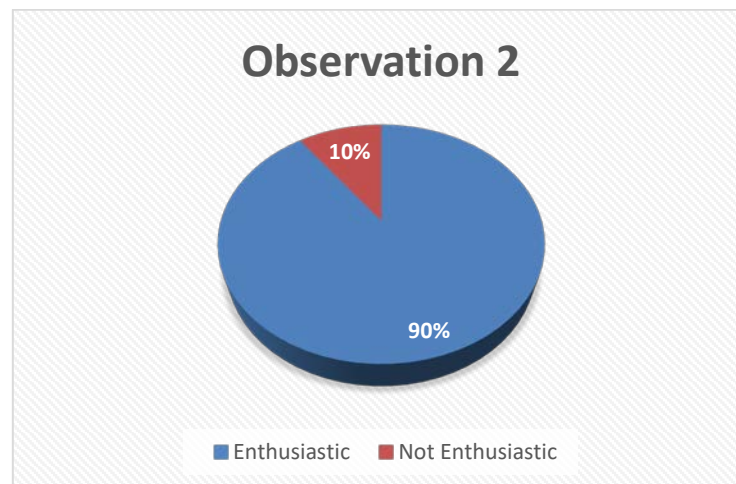

Figure 6. Student' engagement in Observation 2

In this diagram, it can be concluded that students' level of enthusiasm for learning has developed well using word wall media. A total of 90% students are active and enthusiastic in participating in class activities. One of the reasons is that students understand how to play the game or they are quite familiar with the activity. This means that using WordWall media can increase students' enthusiasm for learning and also increase students' vocabulary in learning.

A more comprehensive display of students engagement and participation in compeleting the task can be seen in the following table.

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Table 2. Student Engagement Observations

Observation	Enthusiastic Students	Unenthusiastic Students
Cycle 1	40%	60%%
Cycle 2	90%	10%

Table 2 comprises a clear comparison of students' engagement in all stages. It can be seen that there are significant increase in learning and grade results from cycle to cycle. Data from table concluded that students' level of enthusiasm for learning has developed well using word wall media. A total of 90% students are active and enthusiastic in participating in class activities. One of the reasons is that students understand how to play the game or they are quite familiar with the activity. This means that using WordWall media can increase students' enthusiasm for learning which in turn facilitate them to improve their vocabulary.

The increase in enthusiasm reflects the motivational impact of gamified learning. Students became more active and collaborative, especially during group-based Word Search activities in Cycle 2. These results indicate that word wall really helps teachers to develop alternative teaching media to use in class. This online media is also assumed to improve students' enthusiasm for learning English, making the class more interactive and engaged. Proceeded with Wordwall activities, the discussion learning strategies also become more appealing. From the total of 20 students in class, the improvement from pre cycle to cycle 1 and cycle 2 is vibrant.

4.1.3. Language Skill Integration

During the implementation of the Word Search activities, The researcher observed that students were not only enjoying the game but were also engaging several language skills at once. As shown in Table 3, the activities encouraged the use of reading, pronunciation, meaning, writing, and understanding—all of which are essential components in language learning. The multiple-language component of the activities is summarized in the following table.

Table 3. Language component to measure

No	Language Component	Description
1.	Reading	Read clues and sentences in the Word Search game
2.	Pronunciation	Pronunciation of each word in the Word Search game or sentence pronunciation.
3.	Meaning	Students can find out the meaning of the clues given or they can look in the dictionary to find out the vocabulary of the game
4.	Writing	Students can find out how to write vocabulary correctly through games
5.	Understanding	Understand the material through games, and students can grasp the meaning of vocabulary through games.

Through reading, students were required to read the clues carefully before finding the correct words in the puzzle. This process helped them focus on word recognition and sentence comprehension in a relaxed and playful way. The pronunciation aspect also became noticeable when students tried to pronounce each new word they discovered. Some even repeated the words aloud with their peers, which made the atmosphere lively and supported oral practice naturally.

The meaning component appeared as students became curious about the definitions of the words they found. Many of them checked the meanings using dictionaries or discussed them with their friends, showing active vocabulary exploration. Similarly, the activity supported writing, as

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students paid attention to how each word was spelled correctly in the puzzle. By seeing and writing the words repeatedly, they became more aware of correct spelling and word form.

Finally, the understanding aspect came through as students connected the vocabulary to the lesson material. The game encouraged them to grasp not only what the words looked like but also how they could be used in context. From the researcher's observation, the Word Search game successfully integrated these skills in a fun and meaningful way.

Overall, this experience reflects Nation's (2001) idea that vocabulary learning involves knowing a word's form, meaning, and use. The multimodal nature of the Word Search activity allowed students to experience all these dimensions at once. It showed that even a simple classroom game can promote holistic language development when thoughtfully integrated into the lesson.

4.2. Discussion

The findings supports the effectiveness of Word Search games on Wordwall in enhancing vocabulary mastery and student engagement. The data shows significant progress in vocabulary acquisition, which clearly answer the first research question. This confirms the idea that gamified media can transform passive learning environments into a more active and student-centered environment. Thus the media is not only suitable for Mathematics (Purwitasari, 2022) but also for language learning. Students were not only memorizing words but also learning through exploration and fun competition. Indicating that wordwall enhance students' vocabulary achievement as insisted by Novalie, et, al (2019). Moreover, this gaming media agreed Syahputra's (2014) claim that it creates a more appropriate and meaningful classroom activities.

Regarding the second research question, the study shows that Wordwall positively influenced classroom dynamics. The observation informs that students became more enthusiastic and their participation increased cycle by cycle. The classroom atmosphere felt more alive, and even the quiet students started to join discussions or share answers. This reflects what Deterding et al. (2011) said about the motivational power of gamification—it can make learning more engaging and meaningful when combined with good classroom management and teacher support.

Compared to previous studies, such as Novalia et al. (2019), which highlighted Wordwall's impact on vocabulary achievement, this research adds depth by employing a classroom action research framework. It documents the iterative process of instructional refinement and provides contextual insights specific to Indonesian junior high school settings. Furthermore, integration of digital media in learning can address persistent challenges in EFL classrooms and support meaningful language learning. The researcher's reflection found this process very helpful because it enables teachers to directly see what worked and what needed to be changed to make learning more effective for students. Thus, as a form of support for the use of more communicative classroom activities suggested by Holidazia & Rodliyah (2020), and also proves that employing Wordwall in vocabulary learning is deliberate and systematic (Susanti, 2019)

Throughout the study, the researcher noticed several meaningful moments. Some students who were usually passive started showing excitement when they successfully found difficult words. A few even asked to play again after the lesson ended. This small change might look simple, but it showed their growing interest and confidence in learning English. For me as a teacher, seeing them smile and willingly participate was already a great achievement beyond just the numbers.

Moreover, the use of digital media like Wordwall helped to overcome one of the persistent challenges in EFL classrooms—keeping students motivated while dealing with limited vocabulary. The colorful interface, immediate feedback, and competitive element encouraged students to stay focused longer than in traditional exercises. The researcher realized that technology, when used properly, can make a big difference in how students experience learning. It bridges their love for games with academic goals in a productive way.

However, the researcher also noticed that not all students learned at the same pace. Some still needed more support in understanding meaning or pronunciation. It reminded us that digital tools

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cannot fully replace the teacher's role; they work best when combined with guidance, explanation, and encouragement.

4.   CONCLUSION

This Classroom Action Research project is a dream come true. The use of WordWall as a teaching media showed remarkable improvement in vocabulary mastery, from just 25% in the pre-cycle to 95% by the end of Cycle 2. The study also revealed that students became more enthusiastic and participated more actively in class. In other words, the implementation of Word Search games on Wordwall was not only effective in improving vocabulary mastery but also created a joyful and engaging classroom environment. The experience signified that students learn better when they are happy and involved.

This research recommends the importance of using digital tools like Wordwall to create engaging, interactive learning environments. It offers a glimpse into how gamified learning can foster motivation, autonomy, and a deeper connection with the language.

Future research could explore the long-term retention of vocabulary learned through Wordwall, or how it can be integrated with other language skills like grammar and writing. Teachers are encouraged to embrace innovation and responsiveness in their teaching, making vocabulary instruction purposeful and exciting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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