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The Impact of Scrabble Game on EFL Context: Students Interpretation Ability in Vocabulary

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of the Scrabble teaching method on students' vocabulary interpretation ability in English instruction for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at SMAN 1 Kota Bima. Using a quantitative pre-experimental approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design, the study involved in class XI IPA. Data were collected through vocabulary interpretation tests administered before and after the implementation of the Scrabble teaching method. The findings reveal that the application of the Scrabble teaching method significantly improves students' ability to interpret the meaning of English vocabulary by promoting active participation, collaborative learning, and contextual engagement. The effectiveness of the method was supported by appropriate instructional procedures and teaching techniques. However, the findings also indicate that the success of the implementation is highly dependent on teachers' pedagogical competence in managing classroom activities and integrating game-based instruction effectively. The study concludes that, with proper instructional planning and teacher expertise, the Scrabble teaching method has strong potential to enhance vocabulary interpretation ability and enrich students' overall learning experience in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Scrabble Game; English Foreign Language; Interpretation; Vocabulary*



1. Introduction

The status of English as a foreign language in Indonesia means that English language learning tends to focus on mastering grammatical structures, vocabulary, and reading comprehension rather than on practical and spontaneous language use, as is typically the case for students learning English as a second language (EFL). To achieve English language proficiency, teachers must provide enjoyable learning activities that motivate students to persevere, reduce learning anxiety, and encourage active participation throughout the learning process, Rezai et al (2025); Fang & Tang (2021).

One of the most essential components of language learning for EFL students is vocabulary mastery. A strong vocabulary foundation is crucial for students to understand and express ideas effectively. According to (Rabadi, 2023), vocabulary comprehension is a primary indicator of other language skills, as there is a strong relationship between vocabulary mastery and an individual's ability to understand language deeply. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students often struggle with the four fundamental language skills: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. However, in school contexts, vocabulary learning is frequently perceived as challenging (Hiebert et al., 2019). Many students experience difficulty memorizing and understanding new words, particularly when instruction relies heavily on traditional approaches such as rote memorization, textbook-based exercises, and teacher-centered explanations. Teachers, therefore, need to develop students' deep understanding of word meanings, as one crucial vocabulary skill that learners must master is the ability to interpret the meaning of English vocabulary (N. Murray & Hicks, 2016). This ability enables students to better comprehend words, sentences, and texts encountered through reading and listening activities.

Learning is a process that involves two interconnected aspects: what students are expected to do and how teachers facilitate that process. It consists of a series of reciprocal actions between teachers and students within an educational context aimed at achieving specific learning objectives (Affiana Muthik et al., 2022). In this process, the most important factor is not the number of activities conducted in the classroom, but the extent to which students are actively engaged and able to enjoy the learning experience (Su, 2020).

The vocabulary learning process, therefore, must be designed in an engaging manner to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn and actively participate. Meaningful student involvement in vocabulary learning positively affects motivation and supports long-term vocabulary retention (Annisah, 2024) (Uchihara & Harada, 2018). To achieve this goal, various instructional methods can be applied, one of which is the use of educational games (Park & Kim, 2022). Educational games can create an enjoyable learning atmosphere and help teachers make instruction more meaningful and less intimidating. Games have been shown to be an effective way to relax students while simultaneously providing opportunities to review and reinforce learning concepts (Goldfarb et al., 2022) (Yu et al., 2021). In addition, game-based learning encourages

faster and more effective vocabulary interpretation skills.

One educational game that can be utilized in vocabulary instruction is Scrabble (Tuffiash et al., 2007). Previous studies suggest that Scrabble can help students learn vocabulary more easily and store new words in their memory, thereby improving their ability to interpret word meanings (Dallimore & Mickel, 2011). Scrabble is a word-based game in which players arrange letters printed on tiles to form words that connect with words already placed on the board. The game is generally played by two or more players or teams, and points are awarded based on word formation and letter usage (Rezai et al., 2025) (Madaniyah et al., 2024). Players within a team may assist one another by spelling or suggesting letters, which supports collaborative learning (Sheppard, 2002). The concept of Scrabble was developed by (T. E. Murray, 1985), who combined elements of anagrams and crossword puzzles with a scoring system that rewards strategic word construction. Through this process, Scrabble helps students develop spelling skills, enhance memory, and improve their ability to interpret word meanings. Moreover, because the game is played in groups, it also promotes social interaction and communication skills in the classroom.

Vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms requires engaging instructional methods to enhance students' motivation and long-term retention. Educational games have been recognized as effective approaches for creating meaningful and less intimidating learning environments, and Scrabble has been identified as a teaching method that can support vocabulary learning through word recognition and memory development (Dallimore & Mickel, 2011) (Park & Kim, 2022). However, existing studies have largely focused on vocabulary acquisition and memorization, while empirical evidence examining vocabulary interpretation as a distinct and higher-order skill remains limited, particularly among Indonesian senior high school EFL learners (Kremmel & Schmitt, 2016). This underrepresentation in the literature points to the necessity of examining the effectiveness of the Scrabble teaching method in improving students' ability to interpret the meaning of English vocabulary. By addressing this issue, the present study contributes empirical evidence to the field of English language pedagogy and offers practical insights into the use of game-based teaching methods to enhance vocabulary interpretation skills in EFL classrooms.

Accordingly, this study examines the impact of implementing the Scrabble teaching method on the vocabulary interpretation ability of class XI IPA students' at SMAN 1 Kota Bima. The study aims to provide practical insights for educators into adopting more enjoyable, interactive, and motivating teaching practices that enhance students' learning experiences. The implementation of the Scrabble game is reflected in the design of lesson activities, vocabulary selection, thematic word grouping, and interactive learning tasks, which are systematically structured to foster students' vocabulary interpretation skills. By integrating language instruction with educational games, this approach promotes deeper student engagement and strengthens their

ability to understand contextual meanings, denotative and connotative meanings, appropriate vocabulary use, and relationships among words.

2. Methods

2.1 Design and Samples

This study employed a quantitative pre-experimental approach using a single-group pretest–posttest design (Knapp, 2016). This design was selected to examine the effect of the Scrabble game method on students' vocabulary interpretation ability. The study was conducted at a senior high school in Bima City, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 30 XI IPA at SMAN 1 Kota Bima. The sample was selected through purposive sampling, based on their participation in classroom instruction that incorporated the Scrabble game method.

The objective test was administered to assess students' vocabulary interpretation ability, encompassing their understanding of contextual meaning, denotative and connotative meanings, appropriate vocabulary usage, and lexical relationships. Prior to its administration in the main study, the test was piloted with a small group of students to evaluate its validity and reliability. Based on the pilot results, several items were revised to enhance clarity, content accuracy, and overall measurement quality. In addition, the observation sheet underwent expert validation to establish its content validity and ensure alignment with the indicators of the Scrabble game implementation. The instrument was designed to systematically document student–teacher interactions, levels of student engagement, and the instructional strategies employed throughout the treatment sessions.

The data collection procedure consisted of three sequential stages. First, a pre-test was administered to assess students' baseline vocabulary interpretation ability prior to the intervention. Second, the treatment and observation phase was conducted over four instructional sessions, during which the Scrabble game method was systematically implemented in classroom instruction. Observations were carried out in each session to document the implementation process and monitor student–teacher interactions and instructional practices. Finally, a post-test was administered following the completion of the intervention to measure changes in students' vocabulary interpretation ability. The pre-test and post-test scores were subsequently analyzed to determine the effect of the treatment.

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics were initially computed to summarize the students' pre-test and post-test scores, including the mean, standard deviation, and range (minimum and maximum scores), in order to provide an overview of their vocabulary interpretation performance before and after the intervention (Dugard & Todman, 1995). Prior to hypothesis testing, statistical assumption testing was conducted to ensure that the data met the requirements for parametric analysis. The Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to assess the normality of the score distribution. To determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, a paired-

samples t-test was performed, as the study adopted a single-group pretest–posttest design in which the same participants were measured before and after the treatment. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

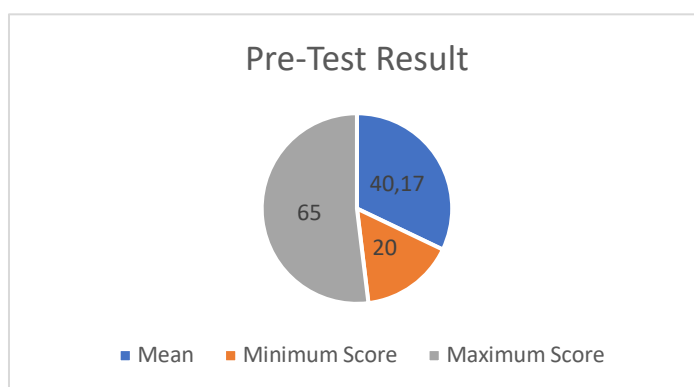
In addition to statistical significance, the magnitude of the treatment effect was calculated using effect size (Cohen’s d) to determine the practical significance of the Scrabble game intervention. The results were then interpreted to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment in improving students’ vocabulary interpretation ability.

3. Results and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of scrabble game on students’ interpretation ability. The pre-test administered to know the initial ability of students and it consist of 20 multiple choice questions. Diagram below describe the data result of students’ ability.

3.1. Results of Pre and Post Test

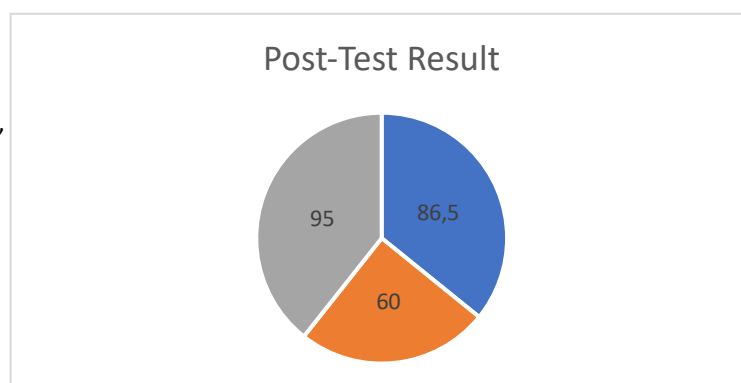
Fig 1. Pre-Test Result



The diagram indicates that the mean pre-test score of the XI IPA students was 40.17, based on a total of 30 participants. The minimum score was 20, while the maximum score reached 65. These findings suggest that the majority of students demonstrated a relatively low level of vocabulary interpretation ability. The pre-test results reveal that students’ difficulty in interpreting vocabulary remains a significant challenge, particularly in understanding contextual, denotative, and connotative meanings, as well as in applying appropriate vocabulary use and recognizing relationships among words. Such limitations may hinder their overall language proficiency. Furthermore, the limited use of engaging instructional methods in classroom practice may contribute to reduced student motivation and lower levels of active participation in English learning activities.

After implementing the Scrabble game in the English learning process in the classroom, the next step was to administer a post-test to assess the students’ vocabulary comprehension ability. The questions used in the post-test were the same as those in the pre-test. The post-test results demonstrated an improvement in the students’ abilities.

Fig 2. Post-Test Result



Based on the post-test results, it was found that the Scrabble game provided a significant improvement in students' vocabulary interpretation ability. The average post-test score was 86.5, with a minimum score of 60 and a maximum score of 95. This improvement occurred after the students participated in the learning process using the Scrabble game in the classroom.

This study demonstrates that the Scrabble game can positively impact vocabulary mastery, particularly in helping students interpret English words. It also provides activities that encourage cognitive engagement, practical application, and social interaction in the classroom. Furthermore, Scrabble can stimulate and motivate students to engage in deeper and more meaningful learning.

Research conducted by (Onasanya et al., 2021) supports the explanation above. Based on their findings, the Scrabble game had several impacts: (1) students performed better when English vocabulary was taught using a digital Scrabble game; (2) no gender differences were found in the use of a digital Scrabble game to teach English vocabulary in Ilorin metropolis; and (3) students showed positive responses toward learning English vocabulary through the digital Scrabble game. These findings confirm that learning English using the Scrabble game is an effective alternative strategy that can involve all students in active participation, thereby improving academic achievement and retention.

3.2. Discussions

The results of this study support the effect of the Scrabble game method as an instructional strategy in vocabulary learning. The findings highlight its relevance not only in improving academic achievement but also in fostering meaningful classroom interaction. The implementation of the Scrabble game reflects an adaptive instructional practice that promotes active and engaging learning experiences.

This study demonstrates that the Scrabble game method enhances students' ability to interpret contextual, denotative, and connotative meanings, apply appropriate vocabulary usage, and recognize lexical relationships (Hrp, 2023). The structured use of the game in classroom activities also fostered cognitive development, intrinsic motivation, social interaction, affective engagement, and student-centered participation. These improvements may be attributed to the integration of strategic thinking, sportsmanship, accuracy, and cooperation embedded within the gameplay process.

Furthermore, the application of the Scrabble game in the classroom reshapes the instructional dynamic by shifting the focus from teacher-centered knowledge transmission to student-centered knowledge construction. In this method, teachers function as facilitators who guide and monitor learning activities, while students actively engage in analyzing words, making strategic decisions, negotiating meaning, and collaborating with peers. As a result, learning becomes a dynamic and interactive process rather than a passive reception of information.

The development of students' cognitive abilities is reflected in the improvement of several key indicators, namely the ability to interpret contextual, denotative, and connotative meanings, apply appropriate vocabulary usage, and identify lexical relationships as follows:

3.2.1 Contextual Meaning Interpretation

The findings of this study indicate that the use of the Scrabble game has a significant positive effect on students' ability to interpret contextual meaning in texts. By arranging letters into meaningful words and linking them to existing words on the board, students actively engage in analyzing how words function within a given context. This process strengthens their understanding of the relationships between words and sentences, allowing them to derive accurate meanings from the text (Bagus & Bayu, 2023). These results suggest that the Scrabble game not only enhances contextual interpretation skills but also fosters cognitive engagement, critical thinking, and active participation in the learning process.

3.2.2 Denotative and Connotative Meaning

Based on the results of this study, the implementation of the Scrabble game method had a significant positive effect on students' understanding of both denotative and connotative meanings. Students were observed to interpret words not only according to their literal definitions but also by considering implied associations and contextual nuances. By arranging letters into meaningful words and connecting them to other words on the board, learners actively practiced analyzing meaning in context. This process improved their accuracy in vocabulary usage, strengthened their ability to interpret sentences within a text, and enhanced overall reading comprehension (Ika et al., 2025).

3.2.3 Apply Appropriate Vocabulary Usage

Effective language learning requires not only careful selection of vocabulary but also engaging instructional methods, such as the Scrabble game, to optimize students' understanding. By using the Scrabble game, students are exposed to relevant and contextual vocabulary in an interactive and meaningful way. This method encourages learners to apply words that relate to their daily lives and consider the appropriate contextual usage within a given situation or topic. As a result, students' vocabulary mastery, comprehension, and ability to interpret language in context are significantly enhanced through active participation in the game.

3.2.4 Identify Lexical Relationships

The ability to identify lexical relationships plays a crucial role in vocabulary learning and language comprehension. It refers to students' capacity to recognize semantic connections among words, such as synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, hypernyms, and collocations. This skill is essential because it helps learners interpret meanings within context rather than relying solely on dictionary definitions (Ilinawati, 2022). By understanding how words relate to one another, students can infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary in reading texts, which significantly enhances their reading comprehension. Furthermore, learning vocabulary through lexical networks strengthens memory retention, as words stored in interconnected patterns are easier to recall. Identifying lexical relationships also promotes higher-order thinking skills, including analyzing, comparing, and categorizing meanings. In productive skills such as speaking and writing, this ability allows learners to use more varied and precise vocabulary, reducing repetition and improving overall language fluency and accuracy.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of implementing the Scrabble game method on improving students' vocabulary interpretation skills in English learning. The findings showed notable improvement in interpreting contextual meanings, distinguishing between denotative and connotative meanings, applying appropriate word choices, and recognizing lexical relationships among words. Despite these positive outcomes, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to one XI IPA class in a single senior high school, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Second, the research employed a single-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, limiting the strength of causal inferences. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the results. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to design comprehensive learning modules that integrate educational games with other English instructional materials to create more interactive, engaging, and enjoyable learning environments for students.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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