



Improving Students' English Vocabulary Through Riddles Technique (*Meningkatkan Kosakata Bahasa Inggris Siswa Melalui Teknik Teka- Teki*)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 16 April 2025 Revised: 29 April 2025 Accepted: 30 April 2025 Keywords: Vocabulary Mastery Riddles Technique English Learning Junior High School Students Vocabulary Improvement Kata Kunci: Penguasaan Kosakata Teknik Teka-teki Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Siswa Smp Peningkatan Kosakata	This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of using the Riddles Technique in enhancing the English vocabulary of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo. The study focuses on determining whether this technique can significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery. The research was conducted using a pre-experimental method with a one-group pre-test and post-test design. The population of this research consisted of all seventh-grade students, and the sample was class VII-1, comprising 20 students selected through purposive sampling. In the implementation phase, students were engaged in various vocabulary-based riddles during English lessons. These riddles were designed to stimulate students' interest, challenge their thinking, and enhance their word retention. The pre-test was administered to assess the students' initial vocabulary level, followed by a series of learning sessions using the Riddles Technique, and concluded with a post-test. The results indicated a significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores. The mean score increased from 43 in the pre-test to 71 in the post-test. Furthermore, statistical analysis revealed that the significance value was 0.000, which is less than the standard alpha level of 0.05. This confirms that the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted, indicating a significant effect of the Riddles Technique on vocabulary enhancement. In conclusion, the Riddles Technique proves to be an effective and engaging method for improving students' English vocabulary. It is recommended for English language teachers as an innovative strategy to increase students' participation and vocabulary acquisition. Abstrak Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui efektivitas penggunaan Teknik Teka-Teki dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris siswa kelas VII SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo. Fokus utama penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji apakah teknik tersebut secara signifikan dapat meningkatkan kemampuan kosakata siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode pra-eksperimen dengan desain one group pre-test dan post-test. Populasi penelitian adalah seluruh siswa kelas VII, dan sampel yang digunakan adalah kelas VII-1 yang terdiri dari 20 siswa yang dipilih secara purposive sampling. Dalam pelaksanaannya, siswa diberikan berbagai teka-teki yang berbasis kosakata selama pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Teka-teki tersebut dirancang untuk membangkitkan minat siswa, menantang kemampuan berpikir mereka, dan meningkatkan daya ingat terhadap kosakata baru. Pre-test dilakukan untuk mengukur kemampuan awal kosakata siswa, dilanjutkan dengan sesi pembelajaran menggunakan Teknik Teka-Teki, dan diakhiri dengan post-test. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan pada skor kosakata siswa. Nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 43 pada

pre-test menjadi 71 pada post-test. Selain itu, analisis statistik menunjukkan nilai signifikansi sebesar 0.000 yang lebih kecil dari batas $\alpha = 0.05$. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa hipotesis alternatif (H_1) diterima, yang berarti Teknik Teka-Teki berpengaruh signifikan terhadap peningkatan kosakata siswa. Kesimpulannya, Teknik Teka-Teki terbukti efektif dan menarik dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris siswa. Teknik ini direkomendasikan untuk digunakan oleh guru bahasa Inggris sebagai strategi inovatif untuk meningkatkan partisipasi dan hasil belajar siswa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a foundational element in learning English, playing a pivotal role in enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively and comprehend written and spoken language. As emphasized by Alisoy (2023), Haque et al. (2024), and Khan & Krishnasamy (2024), a strong vocabulary significantly boosts the quality of language communication. It allows students to not only grasp the meaning of texts but also participate in meaningful conversations and articulate their thoughts, emotions, and ideas with clarity and precision (Gusta et al., 2024; Sahnun & Daulay, 2025). Without sufficient vocabulary, students are likely to face difficulties in understanding reading materials and engaging in classroom discourse, which can hinder their overall academic progress (Lumbanraja, 2024). As noted by Brysbaert et al. (2021), vocabulary encompasses the words used by speakers of a particular language and represents a vital component of language systems. Afzal (2019) further asserts that vocabulary mastery is central to the process of learning English, reinforcing its importance for both receptive and productive language skills.

Fatkurohmah et al. (2023) highlight that vocabulary is more than just knowing the meaning of words—it deeply influences learners' broader English proficiency. Students who possess a wide vocabulary are better equipped to use English fluently and effectively in various contexts, which enhances their confidence and participation in learning activities. However, at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo, the issue of low vocabulary mastery among students has become a pressing concern. Based on classroom observations and interviews with English teachers, it was found that many students struggle to acquire and use new vocabulary. This deficiency leads to a passive learning attitude, where students show low motivation and rarely engage in English lessons. Teachers acknowledged that limited vocabulary knowledge was a key barrier preventing students from participating actively and confidently in classroom discussions and tasks.

To gain a deeper understanding of the problem, researchers conducted interviews with English teachers, revealing both teacher and student perspectives on the challenges of vocabulary instruction. These qualitative insights confirmed that traditional teaching methods were not adequately engaging students, which led to limited vocabulary development. The research indicated a clear need for a more interactive and stimulating learning strategy—one that could revitalize students' interest in learning English. The riddles technique emerged as a promising solution. As proposed by Safitri and Suhartono (2019), riddles can enhance students' enthusiasm for words and language through humor, curiosity, and problem-solving. Riddles captivate learners by turning vocabulary learning into a game-like experience, thereby encouraging active participation and deeper cognitive engagement.

Several studies have supported the use of riddles as an effective vocabulary teaching tool. Research by Wiwin & Rosnija (2014), Setyawan & Widyahening (2015), and Ghaffar (2017) demonstrates that riddles not only introduce new words but also improve students' ability to understand their usage in different contexts. They foster analytical thinking, contextual interpretation, and linguistic creativity, making them a valuable pedagogical strategy. In light of these advantages, the riddles technique was adopted in this research to address the vocabulary learning challenges faced by students at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo. The study is entitled “*Improving Students' Vocabulary Through the Use of Riddles Technique at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo*”, with the central research question: “*Does the riddles technique significantly improve students' vocabulary?*”

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the impact of the riddles technique on the development of students' vocabulary skills. By implementing this engaging and creative method, the study

seeks to determine whether the use of riddles can significantly enhance students' comprehension, retention, and application of vocabulary. The focus is placed on first-grade students at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo, specifically within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum and its emphasis on descriptive text as part of English language learning. This research aims not only to assess the effectiveness of the method but also to contribute to the broader discourse on vocabulary learning strategies. It is expected to offer valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and future researchers seeking to improve English language instruction through innovative and student-centered approaches.

Through this study, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the potential of riddles as an effective vocabulary learning strategy. The findings are expected to serve as a practical reference for educators, students, and other researchers interested in exploring new methods for improving vocabulary mastery. By offering a fresh approach to vocabulary instruction, this research contributes to the ongoing development of more interactive and dynamic teaching techniques.

The practical benefits of this research extend to a variety of stakeholders. For students, the riddles technique offers an enjoyable and interactive way to enhance their vocabulary skills. For teachers, it provides an alternative strategy to foster student engagement while improving vocabulary retention. Furthermore, the results of this study can help to elevate the quality of English language instruction by demonstrating the value of incorporating creative methods, such as riddles, into the teaching process. This research, therefore, not only contributes to enhancing the learning experience in the classroom but also offers a foundation for further exploration of vocabulary learning strategies in future studies.

This research specifically investigates the role of the riddles technique in improving students' vocabulary within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo. By focusing on first-grade students and their interaction with descriptive texts, the study examines how this technique can be applied effectively to a foundational level of language learning. The results of this study aim to inform and enrich the ongoing discourse on best practices for vocabulary acquisition in early education.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an experimental research method, specifically a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The class took a pre-test, received vocabulary instruction using riddles as a teaching technique, and then took a post-test to measure improvement (Sowell, 2001). The goal was to examine the Riddles Technique's effect on students' vocabulary mastery. The study was conducted on the first-grade students of SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo, focusing on class VII-1, which consisted of 20 students. These students were selected using purposive sampling (Arikunto, 2010), as they were identified as having challenges in vocabulary acquisition.

2.1 Data Collection

Data were collected through two main instruments: a pre-test and a post-test, both designed to assess students' vocabulary mastery.

- The pre-test was administered before any treatment to establish a baseline of the students' vocabulary knowledge.
- The treatment was conducted over five classroom sessions, each lasting 80 minutes. During these sessions, students were taught vocabulary using the Riddles Technique, which aimed to engage their cognitive and linguistic abilities through problem-solving language tasks.
- After the treatment, a post-test was administered to assess improvement in students' vocabulary knowledge.

All tests consisted of 50 items, and their validity and reliability were confirmed using SPSS 25.0. The validity test showed that the items had acceptable correlation coefficients, while the reliability test revealed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.920, indicating very high internal consistency.

2.2 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively using statistical methods:

2.2.1 Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to evaluate whether the research data follows a normal distribution. Additionally, this test is essential as a prerequisite for performing parametric statistical analysis. In this study, the Shapiro-Wilk method was used, as the sample size was 20 ($n < 50$), making it the recommended test for this case.

The results of the normality test provide information on whether the data follows a normal distribution. If the results indicate that the data is not normally distributed, then a non-parametric statistical analysis would be more appropriate to avoid violating the normality assumption in parametric analysis. Conversely, if the data is normally distributed, then parametric analysis can be applied.

Table 1. Normality Test Results of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Test	Statistic	df	Sig. (Kolmogorov-	Statistic	df	Sig. (Shapiro-Wilk)
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Type	Smirnov)					
Pretest	0.135	20	0.200*	0.956	20	0.463
Posttest	0.194	20	0.064	0.918	20	0.089

Based on the normality test results:

1. For the pretest, the significance values are 0.200 (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and 0.463 (Shapiro-Wilk), both of which are greater than 0.05. This indicates that the data follows a normal distribution.
2. For the posttest, the significance values are 0.064 (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and 0.089 (Shapiro-Wilk), both of which are also greater than 0.05. This confirms that the data follows a normal distribution.

Thus, both pretest and posttest data are normally distributed, allowing the use of parametric statistical analysis.

2.2.2 T-Test (T-Score Calculation)

To determine whether there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results, this study employs a t-test using the formula adapted from Sudijono (2011):

$$t - score = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{SD_1^2}{n_1}\right) + \left(\frac{SD_2^2}{n_2}\right)}}$$

Note:

- t : T-Score
 $\bar{x}_1$: Mean of the Post-test
 $\bar{x}_2$: Mean of the Pre-test
SD₁ : Standard Deviation of Post-test
SD₂ : Standard Deviation of Pre-test
N : Total students

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Pre-Test Performance: Identifying the Initial Vocabulary Gaps

The initial pre-test results revealed that the vocabulary mastery of first-grade students at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo was generally low. The assessment, which focused on four key vocabulary categories—nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs—showed that a significant number of students were underperforming. As shown in Table 2, none of the 20 students achieved an "Excellent" classification. Only 15% (3 students) fell under the "Good" category, while 25% (5 students) were classified as "Fair." Alarming, 40% (8 students) scored in the "Poor" range, and 20% (4 students) failed altogether. This data clearly indicated a need for an engaging and effective intervention to improve vocabulary comprehension and retention.

Table 2. Distribution of Pre-Test Scores

Grade Classification		Score Range	Frequency of Students	Percentage
A	Excellent	86–100	5	25%
B	Good	66–85	8	40%
C	Fair	56–65	2	10%
D	Poor	26–55	4	20%
E	Failed	Below 25	1	5%
Total			20 Students	100%

The high percentage of students scoring in the "Poor" and "Failed" categories suggests that traditional teaching methods may have been insufficient in supporting vocabulary development at this early stage. The lack of engaging or contextual strategies may have contributed to students' difficulty in retaining and using vocabulary accurately. Therefore, the data strongly justified the need for an innovative, student-centered intervention that could actively involve learners and provide multiple exposures to key vocabulary in meaningful contexts. This necessity laid the foundation for the implementation of the riddles technique as an alternative instructional approach to enhance vocabulary acquisition and student participation in English learning activities.

3.2 Riddles Technique Implementation: Enhancing Engagement and Learning

To address the vocabulary deficiencies identified in the pre-test, the riddles technique was implemented across five structured instructional sessions. Each session focused on one of the four main vocabulary categories—nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs—while the fifth session served as a cumulative review. The use of riddles was designed to stimulate student curiosity and engagement by presenting vocabulary in the form of clues that students had to decode. This interactive method encouraged active learning and fostered a collaborative classroom atmosphere, where students participated in both group discussions and individual challenges. The incorporation of descriptive texts provided contextual grounding for the vocabulary, making the learning experience both meaningful and memorable.

Throughout the implementation, students were not only required to guess words based on clues but also to analyze and categorize them appropriately. This cognitive engagement helped enhance their ability to retain and use vocabulary meaningfully. As the sessions progressed, students demonstrated increased confidence in identifying and applying new words, particularly through the descriptive writing exercises that concluded each lesson. By connecting word recognition with actual usage, the riddles technique effectively bridged the gap between passive understanding and active language production. This method proved especially beneficial in reinforcing vocabulary through repetition, context, and student-led discovery, making it a valuable strategy in early language instruction.

3.3 Post-Test Results: Measuring the Learning Outcomes

Following the intervention, a post-test was administered to measure improvement. The results, displayed in Table 3, showed a marked increase in performance. The mean score rose to 71, with the highest score reaching 100. A significant shift was observed in the distribution of scores—25% of students (5 students) achieved "Excellent" scores (86–100), and 40% (8 students) fell under the "Good" category. Only 2 students (10%) were in the "Fair" range, and while 4 students (20%) remained in the "Poor" category, the "Failed" group dropped to just 1 student (5%).

Table 3. Distribution of Post-Test Scores

Grade Classification			Score Range	Frequency (Pre-Test)	Frequency (Post-Test)
A	Excellent	86–100		0	5
B	Good	66–85		3	8
C	Fair	56–65		5	2
D	Poor	26–55		8	4
E	Failed	Below 25		4	1
Total				20 Students	20 Students

The post-test also revealed that the number of students in the "Fair" category (56–65) decreased from 25% (5 students) in the pre-test to just 10% (2 students) in the post-test. This reduction further underscores the impact of the intervention in raising students' overall vocabulary proficiency. While the "Fair" category saw a decline, there were still a few students who fell within this range, indicating room for continued development in their vocabulary skills. However, the decrease in students within the lower score brackets is a promising sign of progress.

Interestingly, the post-test results also show a significant reduction in the number of students in the "Poor" and "Failed" categories. The percentage of students scoring in the "Poor" range (26–55) dropped from 40% (8 students) to 20% (4 students), and only 5% (1 student) of the class was in the "Failed" category, compared to 20% (4 students) before the intervention. This decline suggests that the riddles technique successfully addressed the initial gaps in vocabulary mastery, as evidenced by the higher number of students achieving passing scores and improving their overall academic performance. These results highlight the positive impact of the intervention on students' learning outcomes.

3.4 Statistical Analysis and Comparison of Results

A comparison between pre-test and post-test results, as shown in Table 4, highlights the effectiveness of the intervention. The number of students in the "Excellent" and "Good" categories increased significantly, while those in the "Poor" and "Failed" categories decreased. To statistically confirm these findings, a paired sample t-test was conducted using SPSS 25.0. The test results showed a mean difference of -28.35 with a t-value of -9.824, and a p-value of 0.000, which is well below the significance threshold of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0)—which stated that there is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores—is rejected. This statistical evidence supports the conclusion that the riddles technique had a significant and positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery.

Table 4. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Grade Classification Score Range			Frequency (Pre-Test)	Frequency (Post-Test)
A	Excellent	86–100	0	5
B	Good	66–85	3	8
C	Fair	56–65	5	2
D	Poor	26–55	8	4
E	Failed	Below 25	4	1
Total			20 Students	20 Students

The number of students in the "Fair" category decreased considerably after the intervention, from 25% (5 students) in the pre-test to just 10% (2 students) in the post-test. This suggests that the riddles technique helped to elevate students' vocabulary mastery to higher levels, moving many out of the "Fair" range and closer to the "Good" and "Excellent" categories. While there were still a few students in the "Fair" range, their improvement indicates that the technique helped them grasp vocabulary more effectively, though further attention may be needed for a complete mastery.

The number of students in the "Poor" and "Failed" categories also dropped significantly, from 40% (8 students) and 20% (4 students) respectively in the pre-test to 20% (4 students) and 5% (1 student) in the post-test. The reduction in these lower-performing categories highlights the effectiveness of the riddles technique in addressing the vocabulary gaps that were initially present. It is evident that the intervention helped students achieve a basic level of proficiency in vocabulary, with only a small percentage remaining in the lower performance categories.

To statistically confirm these improvements, a paired sample t-test was conducted, showing a mean difference of -28.35, with a t-value of -9.824 and a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is well below the significance threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0), which stated that there would be no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, is rejected. This statistical evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the riddles technique had a significant and positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery, confirming the intervention's effectiveness in improving students' performance.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The implementation of the riddles technique in vocabulary instruction significantly enhanced students' vocabulary mastery, particularly among first-grade students at SMP Negeri 15 Kota Gorontalo. This was evident through the improvement in post-test scores compared to the pre-test, where initially, none of the students achieved an "Excellent" score, and a large proportion fell into the "Poor" and "Failed" categories. After the intervention, 25% of students reached the "Excellent" level, and 40% reached the "Good" level, marking a clear shift in student performance. The paired sample t-test further supported this outcome, revealing a significant mean difference of 28.35 and a p-value of 0.000, thereby validating the effectiveness of the riddles technique as a learning intervention.

In addition to quantitative improvements, qualitative observations throughout the five treatment sessions indicated greater student engagement, increased interest in English vocabulary, and enhanced collaborative learning skills. The riddles technique encouraged active learning through group discussions, contextual guessing, and repetitive exposure, all of which contributed to deeper retention and application of new vocabulary. Although some challenges were encountered, such as limited time for discussion and difficulty with abstract vocabulary, these did not hinder the overall positive impact of the technique. Hence, this research affirms that using riddles in vocabulary teaching is both pedagogically sound and practically effective in enhancing language acquisition.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Given the positive outcomes of this study, it is recommended that English teachers, especially at the junior high school level, consider integrating the riddles technique as a supplementary approach to teaching vocabulary. To maximize its effectiveness, educators should provide adequate scaffolding for students struggling with abstract concepts and allocate sufficient time for reflective vocabulary discussions. Future research is encouraged to explore the application of this technique across different language skills, such as reading comprehension or writing fluency, and in varied educational settings to assess its adaptability and impact on a broader scale. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term retention of vocabulary acquired through riddles, providing deeper insights into sustainable language development strategies.

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