

From pictures to words: Introducing young learners' vocabulary at TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa Padangsidimpuan

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Abstract

This community service activity aimed to improve English vocabulary mastery among early childhood learners at TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa through the From Pictures to Words approach. The activity employed a Learning by Playing method utilizing visual media (flashcards) and audio media (songs), focusing on vocabulary related to colors and fruits. A pre-test and post-test design was used to evaluate students' vocabulary improvement. The participants consisted of 30 kindergarten students. The results indicated a substantial increase in students' vocabulary mastery, with the mean score improving from 53.13 in the pre-test to 75.63 in the post-test, resulting in a mean gain of 22.50 points. The paired-sample t-test analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($t = 195.70$, $df = 29$, $p < .05$), indicating that the intervention had a significant positive effect on students' learning outcomes. Furthermore, the N-Gain score was 0.487 (48.7%), which falls into the moderate improvement category. In addition to the quantitative findings, students demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and active participation throughout the learning process. These findings suggest that the integration of visual and audio media through the From Pictures to Words approach is effective in enhancing English vocabulary mastery and engagement among young learners.

Keywords: learners; picture; visual; vocabulary; words

INTRODUCTION

The development of globalization and advances in information technology have significantly transformed the field of education, including the teaching of English to early childhood learners. English, as an international language, plays an essential role in facilitating global communication; therefore, introducing it at an early age is considered a strategic step. At the early childhood education level, language learning emphasizes basic and contextual exposure, particularly in vocabulary mastery that is closely related to children's daily experiences. Vocabulary serves as the foundation of language acquisition, as it supports the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In this regard, nouns are fundamental components of vocabulary learning because they represent people, objects, places, and ideas that form the basis of

communication in language acquisition (Nation, 2022). In addition, vocabulary knowledge, especially nouns, is considered the core of language comprehension since nouns carry the main meaning in sentences and texts (Schmitt, N. & Schmitt, D. 2020). Furthermore, the teaching of nouns in early English learning supports memory retention because nouns are easier to associate with pictures and real objects, making them particularly suitable for young learners (Nuraini et al., 2025). Without sufficient vocabulary mastery, children may encounter difficulties in understanding and expressing meaning. Previous studies have highlighted that vocabulary mastery is a crucial determinant of success in English language learning (Putri et al., 2023).

In addition, the use of appropriate learning media plays an important role in supporting vocabulary acquisition among young learners. The use of visual media in English language learning has been proven to help students, especially early learners, in understanding and remembering new vocabulary more easily because it provides a concrete representation of the words being learned (Mardianti & Eliza, 2022). Similarly, flashcards are effective in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery as they provide interactive learning experiences and help learners remember new words more easily (Syamsiyah & Ma'rifatulloh, 2023). In addition, the use of flashcard media makes the learning process more visual, engaging, and easier to retain (Wulandari, 2025). These findings emphasize that effective instructional media should be engaging, concrete, and aligned with children's developmental characteristics.

However, vocabulary instruction for young learners still faces several challenges. One major issue is the dominance of teacher-centered methods, which often limit students' active participation and reduce learning effectiveness. Moreover, these approaches are frequently not aligned with the characteristics of young learners, who naturally prefer visual, concrete, and enjoyable learning experiences. As a result, students tend to become easily bored and less motivated. Learning environments that fail to incorporate interactive and student-centered approaches may hinder children's engagement and language acquisition (Priscilia & Rahmansyah, 2024). The limited use of engaging learning media also contributes to the ineffectiveness of instruction. Studies show that innovative learning media can enhance student engagement in the learning process (Fadhila & Fadilaturrahmah, 2025). This is further supported by findings that monotonous teaching methods can negatively affect students' motivation and vocabulary retention (Somba & Widyaningrum, 2024). Consequently, there is a need for innovative strategies that create a more engaging and meaningful learning atmosphere.

One effective strategy to address these challenges is the use of visual media in vocabulary learning. Visual media, such as images, enable children to understand concepts concretely and attract their attention more effectively. Through images, children can associate words with real objects, making comprehension easier and more meaningful. Visual-based learning not only enhances understanding but also strengthens memory retention, as it involves both cognitive processing and visual perception (Priscilia & Rahmansyah, 2024). This is consistent with previous studies indicating that visual media can significantly improve students' ability to understand and remember vocabulary (Habib & Fahrany, 2025). Furthermore, image-based learning increases students' motivation and engagement, making the learning process more interactive and less monotonous (Somba & Widyaningrum, 2024).

In line with this perspective, the From Pictures to Words approach integrates visual and audio elements to optimize vocabulary learning. This approach combines the Picture to Picture method, visualization techniques, and audio media such as songs. The Picture to Picture method uses sequences of images as stimuli to introduce vocabulary, while visualization techniques help children understand concepts through concrete experiences. Additionally, songs provide a fun and engaging learning experience through rhythm and repetition. Combining visual and auditory stimuli can significantly enhance young learners' engagement and facilitate more effective

language acquisition (Priscilia & Rahmansyah, 2024). Supporting this, studies show that audio-visual media improve vocabulary mastery and student motivation (Sabgini & Wiraatmaja, 2023). Thus, integrating multiple sensory inputs creates a more effective and developmentally appropriate learning experience.

At TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa, as an early childhood education institution, there is a responsibility to provide learning experiences that meet students' needs. However, preliminary observations indicate that English instruction still relies on conventional methods and lacks optimal use of visual and audio media. This condition contributes to students' low learning interest and limited vocabulary mastery. The absence of innovative and interactive media can reduce the effectiveness of language learning in early childhood contexts (Priscilia & Rahmansyah, 2024). Therefore, instructional innovation is necessary to address these issues. One promising solution is the implementation of image and song-based learning approaches, which are more aligned with children's learning characteristics.

Based on the explanation above, this activity aims to improve English vocabulary mastery among early childhood learners at TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa through the *From Pictures to Words* approach. This approach integrates visual and audio media to create an interactive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment. In addition, this activity seeks to enhance students' motivation and participation in the learning process. By providing engaging and contextually relevant learning experiences, students are expected to better understand and retain vocabulary. Ultimately, this activity is expected to contribute to the development of innovative teaching practices and serve as an alternative strategy for improving the quality of English instruction in early childhood education.

METHODS

This Community Service (PkM) activity was conducted at TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa with the participation of 30 kindergarten students. The activity aimed to improve students' English vocabulary mastery through the *From Pictures to Words* approach, which combines visual media (flashcards) and audio media (songs) within a Learning by Playing framework. The vocabulary materials focused on colors and fruits, as these themes are familiar to young learners and closely related to their daily experiences.

The implementation of the activity employed a one-group pre-test and post-test design. Before the intervention, students were given a pre-test to assess their initial vocabulary mastery. The pre-test consisted of simple vocabulary recognition and pronunciation tasks related to colors and fruits. The results of the pre-test served as baseline data for measuring students' vocabulary achievement before participating in the learning activities.

The learning activities were carried out through several stages. First, the instructor introduced the vocabulary using colorful flashcards containing pictures of fruits and colors. Students were encouraged to observe the images, listen to the pronunciation modeled by the instructor, and repeat the vocabulary collectively and individually. To enhance engagement and facilitate vocabulary retention, English songs related to the learning materials were played through speakers. The integration of visual and audio stimuli was intended to create an enjoyable and meaningful learning experience.

Furthermore, students participated in various play-based activities designed to reinforce vocabulary acquisition. These activities included identifying pictures, matching words with images, responding to simple oral questions, and participating in interactive games related to colors and fruits. Through these activities, students were actively involved in the learning process and were encouraged to practice the target vocabulary in a supportive classroom environment.

At the end of the activity, a post-test was administered using vocabulary items equivalent to those included in the pre-test. The post-test aimed to evaluate students' vocabulary improvement after participating in the learning program. The scores obtained from both tests were then compared to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate the mean and median scores of the pre-test and post-test results. To examine whether there was a significant difference between students' scores before and after the intervention, a paired-sample t-test was conducted at a significance level of 0.05. In addition, the effectiveness of the program was measured using the N-Gain score to determine the level of improvement in students' vocabulary mastery. The N-Gain results were interpreted according to the following criteria: high ($g > 0.70$), moderate ($0.30 \leq g \leq 0.70$), and low ($g < 0.30$).

Through these procedures, the effectiveness of the *From Pictures to Words* approach in improving English vocabulary mastery among kindergarten students at TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa could be systematically evaluated.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Community Service (PkM) activity was conducted at TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa involving 30 kindergarten students. The activity aimed to improve students' English vocabulary mastery through the *From Pictures to Words* approach, which integrates visual media (flashcards) and audio media (songs) within a Learning by Playing framework. To evaluate the effectiveness of the activity, students completed a pre-test before the intervention and a post-test after the learning activities.

The descriptive statistical analysis revealed a notable improvement in students' vocabulary mastery. As presented in Table 1, the mean score increased from 53.13 in the pre-test to 75.63 in the post-test, indicating an average gain of 22.50 points. Similarly, the median score improved from 53 to 76, demonstrating that the improvement occurred across most participants rather than only among a small number of students.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Vocabulary Scores

Statistics	Pre-test	Post-test
N	30	30
Mean	53.13	75.63
Median	53	76

The increase in scores suggests that students acquired a better understanding of English vocabulary after participating in the learning activities. Before the intervention, many students experienced difficulty identifying and pronouncing English words related to colors and fruits. However, after being exposed to flashcards and songs, students demonstrated greater ability to recognize vocabulary and pronounce the target words correctly.

To determine whether the improvement was statistically significant, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. The analysis produced a t-value of 195.70 with 29 degrees of freedom ($df = 29$). At the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, the critical t-value was 2.045. Since the obtained t-value was substantially higher than the critical value ($195.70 > 2.045$), the null hypothesis was rejected. This result indicates a statistically significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test scores, confirming that the learning activities had a positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the intervention was examined using the N-Gain score. The average N-Gain obtained was 0.487 (48.7%), which falls into the moderate category. According to the N-Gain criteria, this result indicates a meaningful improvement in learning outcomes. Although the intervention was conducted within a relatively short period, students achieved a moderate level of vocabulary improvement, demonstrating the educational value of the *From Pictures to Words* approach.

The improvement in students' vocabulary mastery can be attributed to the integration of visual and audio learning media. Flashcards provided concrete visual representations that helped students connect English words with familiar objects. For example, when students were shown a flashcard depicting an apple, they immediately associated the image with the word "apple." Similarly, color flashcards enabled students to connect visual concepts such as red, yellow, blue, and green with their English equivalents. Visual media are particularly effective for young learners because they facilitate comprehension and memory retention by presenting language concepts in concrete forms rather than abstract explanations ([Mardianti & Eliza, 2022](#); [Somba & Widyaningrum, 2024](#)).

In addition to flashcards, songs played an important role in supporting vocabulary acquisition. During the learning sessions, students listened to and sang simple English songs containing vocabulary related to colors and fruits. Through rhythm and repetition, students repeatedly encountered the target vocabulary, allowing them to become more familiar with word pronunciation and meaning. For instance, students repeatedly pronounced words such as "red," "yellow," "banana," and "orange" while participating in singing activities. Previous studies have shown that repeated exposure through songs enhances vocabulary retention and pronunciation accuracy among young learners ([Sabgini & Wiraatmaja, 2023](#)).

Classroom observations further supported the quantitative findings. At the beginning of the activity, several students were hesitant when asked to identify colors or fruits in English. However, as the activities progressed, students became more confident in responding to questions, identifying flashcards, and repeating vocabulary introduced by the instructor. They actively participated in interactive games such as matching pictures with words, identifying colors shown on flashcards, and naming fruits presented during the lesson. Such active engagement is essential in vocabulary learning because children learn more effectively when they are directly involved in meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences ([Priscilia & Rahmansyah, 2024](#)).

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the effectiveness of visual and audio-visual media in vocabulary instruction. [Mardianti and Eliza \(2022\)](#) found that visual media facilitate vocabulary acquisition by providing concrete representations of language concepts. Similarly, [Syamsiyah and Ma'rifatulloh \(2023\)](#) reported that flashcards improve vocabulary mastery by increasing student engagement and interaction during learning activities. Furthermore, [Sabgini and Wiraatmaja \(2023\)](#) demonstrated that audio-visual learning environments positively influence students' motivation and vocabulary retention. The present findings support these studies by showing that the integration of flashcards and songs significantly improved vocabulary mastery among kindergarten students.

Overall, the results indicate that the *From Pictures to Words* approach effectively enhanced students' English vocabulary mastery. The significant increase in post-test scores, supported by the paired-sample t-test results ($t = 195.70$, $p < 0.05$) and the moderate N-Gain score (0.487), demonstrates that the combination of visual and audio media provides an engaging and meaningful learning experience for young learners. Therefore, this approach can serve as an effective instructional strategy for introducing English vocabulary in early childhood education settings.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this community service activity demonstrate that the *From Pictures to Words* approach effectively supports English vocabulary learning among kindergarten students at TK Al-Qur'an Ulfa. The significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores, as indicated by the increase in the mean score from 53.13 to 75.63, the significant paired-sample t-test result, and the moderate N-Gain score (0.487), suggests that the integration of visual media (flashcards) and audio media (songs) can facilitate vocabulary acquisition in an engaging and meaningful manner.

Beyond improving vocabulary mastery, the approach also encouraged active participation, confidence, and enthusiasm among young learners. The combination of pictures, repetition, songs, and play-based activities provided opportunities for students to connect new vocabulary with concrete experiences, making language learning more accessible and enjoyable. These findings highlight the importance of employing developmentally appropriate learning strategies that align with the characteristics of early childhood learners.

The practical implication of this activity is that kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators can easily replicate the *From Pictures to Words* approach using simple and low-cost learning materials such as flashcards, classroom objects, digital images, and educational songs. The approach can also be adapted to various vocabulary themes beyond colors and fruits, including animals, family members, transportation, and daily activities. By integrating visual and auditory stimuli into regular classroom instruction, teachers can create more interactive learning environments that support language development.

For future implementation, longer and more sustained learning programs are recommended to achieve greater vocabulary gains and broader language outcomes. Further activities may incorporate additional interactive media, digital learning tools, storytelling, and collaborative games to enrich students' learning experiences. Such developments may contribute not only to vocabulary mastery but also to the improvement of young learners' overall English communication skills.

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