


Teaching Vocabulary Through Cartoon Movies to Increase Seventh-Grade Students' Vocabulary Mastery

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery was a crucial element of English learning because it enabled students to communicate effectively in various contexts. However, many junior high school students still had limited vocabulary knowledge and low learning motivation, which created a gap between expected learning outcomes and actual classroom practice. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of using cartoon movies in improving the vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 12 Palu. This research employed a quasi-experimental design with a non-randomized control group using pre-test and post-test. The participants consisted of 30 students who were divided into experimental and control groups. Vocabulary tests were administered as the research instrument, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, and the Mann-Whitney U Test. The results indicated that students who were taught using cartoon movies showed a significant improvement compared to those who were taught using conventional methods. Thus, cartoon movies enhanced students' vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: *Cartoon Movie, Vocabulary Mastery, Teaching Media, Junior High School Students*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery plays a fundamental role in English language learning because it enables learners to understand messages and express ideas effectively through both spoken and written communication. Vocabulary includes various word classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections, all of which are essential for meaningful language use. Saripah (2022) defines vocabulary as a collection of words used by humans in speaking and writing, while Christopher (1999) states that vocabulary encompasses all information related to the meaning and use of words possessed by speakers, writers, and listeners. Furthermore, John (2000) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge involves understanding word meanings and their appropriate use, and vocabulary assessment aims to measure learners' ability to match words with synonyms, definitions, or equivalents in their first language. Recent studies have also confirmed that vocabulary knowledge is a strong predictor of overall language proficiency and supports learners' ability to develop the four language skills effectively (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2019). Therefore, vocabulary mastery is not limited to memorizing words but also includes the ability to use them accurately and appropriately in context.

In junior high schools, vocabulary learning is integrated into the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – as well as other language components such as grammar and pronunciation. In line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, vocabulary instruction is expected to be contextual, student-centered, and oriented toward strengthening students' literacy. According to Kemendikbudristek (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and differentiated learning, allowing teachers to adapt learning activities to students' needs, abilities, and local contexts. Recent research supports

this approach, indicating that contextual and communicative vocabulary instruction enhances students' engagement and long-term retention (Putri & Wahyuni, 2023; Yuliani et al., 2023). Vocabulary mastery becomes more effective when it is taught through meaningful and communicative activities that reflect real-life language use, which aligns with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum in promoting active learning and learner autonomy.

However, despite the acknowledged importance of vocabulary mastery, many previous studies have reported persistent problems in vocabulary learning among junior high school students. Several researchers found that students often struggle to memorize and retain new words when vocabulary is taught using conventional methods such as translation, drilling, and textbook-based exercises (Panjaitan et al., 2021; Susanto, 2017). Other studies revealed that students tend to lose interest during vocabulary lessons due to monotonous teaching strategies, resulting in low motivation and passive classroom participation (Sari & Aminatun, 2021; Zainal & Rahmat, 2020). More recent findings also show that limited exposure to engaging media contributes to students' difficulty in applying vocabulary in communicative contexts (Firmansyah et al., 2024). These conditions lead to difficulties in understanding word meanings, using vocabulary in sentences, and developing overall communicative competence. Therefore, many scholars emphasize the need for more engaging, contextual, and student-centered media to address these recurring problems in vocabulary instruction.

Previous studies have explored various media to improve vocabulary mastery, such as flashcards, mnemonic techniques, social media platforms, and English movies with subtitles (Alpiana, 2020; Ummah, 2019; Firmansyah et al., 2024). While these studies generally reported positive effects, most of them focused on general English movies, vocabulary learning strategies, or learners at different educational levels. In contrast, limited research has specifically examined the use of cartoon movies for seventh-grade students within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in Indonesian junior high schools. Therefore, this study offers novelty by investigating the effectiveness of cartoon movies as instructional media that integrate visual and auditory elements, support differentiated learning, and promote active student engagement in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum. This research aims to fill the gap by providing empirical evidence on the use of cartoon movies to enhance vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 12 Palu.

Based on the findings of previous studies, the researcher is interested in investigating the use of cartoon movies as a medium for teaching vocabulary. Cartoon movies provide meaningful language input, authentic pronunciation, and natural intonation in an enjoyable and memorable way (Matulesy & Kahar, 2024). Moreover, their visual and auditory appeal supports differentiated learning and encourages active, student-centered participation, which aligns with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. Considering the vocabulary learning problems faced by seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 12 Palu, such as low motivation, limited vocabulary knowledge, and difficulty applying words in context, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of cartoon movies in improving students' vocabulary mastery.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental research design with a non-randomized control group pre-test and post-test. This design was chosen because the researcher could not randomly assign individual students to groups, as the classes had been formed by the school administration prior to the study. Two intact classes were involved: one class served as the experimental group and the other as the control group. The experimental group received vocabulary instruction through cartoon movies, while the control group was taught using conventional teaching methods. A pre-test was administered to both groups before the treatment to measure students' initial vocabulary mastery, and a post-test was given after the treatment to examine students' vocabulary improvement.

Respondents and Sampling Technique

The respondents of this study were seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 12 Palu in the academic year 2025/2026. The total number of participants was 30 students, consisting of two classes. Class VII A, which consisted of 15 students, was assigned as the experimental group, while Class VII B, also consisting of 15 students, served as the control group.

Cluster random sampling was applied in this study. This technique was chosen because the population was organized into intact classes, and it was not feasible to select students individually. From the available seventh-grade classes, two classes were randomly selected, and then randomly assigned as the experimental and control groups. The number of 30 students was considered adequate because it met the minimum requirement for experimental research in educational settings and allowed for balanced group comparison while maintaining the practicality of classroom-based research.

Instruments

The instrument used to collect the data was a vocabulary test administered as both a pre-test and a post-test. The test consisted of 30 items divided into three types: matching words (5 items), multiple-choice questions (20 items), and fill-in-the-blank questions (5 items). The test was designed to measure students' vocabulary mastery focusing on the meaning and use of common nouns, action verbs, and descriptive adjectives, which were appropriate to the seventh-grade curriculum. Each correct answer was scored one point, and the maximum possible score was 30.

Procedures

The research procedures consisted of three main stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. The pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups before the treatment to identify students' initial vocabulary mastery. The results of the pre-test were used as a baseline to compare students' progress after the treatment.

The treatment was conducted over six meetings, with each meeting lasting approximately 2×40 minutes, following the regular English lesson schedule. In the experimental group, vocabulary instruction was delivered through cartoon movies that were selected based on the syllabus. Each lesson followed three stages: pre-watching, while-watching, and post-watching activities. In the pre-watching stage, the teacher introduced the topic, activated students' background knowledge, and explained key vocabulary. During the while-watching stage, students watched the cartoon movie segments while focusing on identifying new vocabulary, pronunciation, and contextual meaning. In the post-watching stage, students completed vocabulary exercises, discussed word meanings, and practiced using the new words in sentences or short dialogues.

In contrast, the control group received vocabulary instruction using conventional teaching methods without cartoon movies. The teaching activities mainly involved explanation of vocabulary from the textbook, translation, repetition, and written exercises. Students were asked to memorize word lists and complete textbook-based tasks related to the lesson topics.

After the treatment was completed, a post-test was administered to both groups using the same format as the pre-test to measure students' vocabulary improvement and to determine the effectiveness of the treatment.

Data analysis

The data collected from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores, minimum and maximum scores, and standard deviations of students' vocabulary achievement. Prior to hypothesis testing, normality tests were conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Since the data were not normally distributed, non-parametric statistical tests were applied. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to analyze the differences between pre-test and post-test scores within each group, while the Mann-Whitney U Test was employed to compare the post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS with a significance level of 0.05.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest_eksperimen	15	30	97	65.60	23.634
Pretest_kontrol	15	20	93	54.40	28.980
Valid N (listwise)	15				

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores for both the experimental and control groups. Each group consisted of 15 students. The experimental group obtained a minimum score of 30 and a maximum score of 97, with a mean score of 65.60 and a standard deviation of 23.634. This result indicated that students' initial vocabulary mastery in the experimental group was at a moderate level with considerable variation among students.

Meanwhile, the control group achieved a minimum score of 20 and a maximum score of 93, with a mean score of 54.40 and a standard deviation of 28.980. These results showed that the control group's initial vocabulary mastery was lower and more varied compared to the experimental group. Overall, the pre-test results indicated that both groups had different initial vocabulary abilities, although both demonstrated varied levels of mastery.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Post-Test
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Posttest_eksperimen	15	83	100	92.00	6.612
Posttest_kontrol	15	30	80	58.13	14.387
Valid N (listwise)	15				

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the post-test scores after the treatment. The experimental group obtained a minimum score of 83 and a maximum score of 100, with a mean score of 92.00 and a standard deviation of 6.612. These results indicated that students' vocabulary mastery in the experimental group reached an excellent level, with relatively homogeneous achievement.

In contrast, the control group achieved a minimum score of 30 and a maximum score of 80, with a mean score of 58.13 and a standard deviation of 14.387. This showed that students' vocabulary mastery in the control group remained at a moderate to low level with greater score variation. The post-test results demonstrated a clear difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups after the treatment.

Table 3. Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test
Test Statistics^a

	Pretest_Kontrol - Pretest_eksperimen	Posttest_Kontrol - Posttest_eksperimen
Z	-1.079 ^b	-3.412 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.280	.001

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on positive ranks.

The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test results are presented in Table 3. The analysis showed that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test (Sig. = 0.280 > 0.05). However, the post-test results indicated a significant difference, with a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). This finding demonstrated that a statistically significant change occurred after the treatment was implemented.

Table 4. Results of Mann-Whitney U Test
Test Statistics^a

	Nilai
Mann-Whitney U	306.000
Wilcoxon W	771.000

a. Grouping Variable: Kelompok

Table 4 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U Test comparing the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The test yielded a Mann–Whitney U value of 306.000 and a Z value of –2.132. The Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.033, which was lower than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted, indicating a significant difference between the two groups' post-test scores.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the use of cartoon movies had a significant effect on improving seventh-grade students' vocabulary mastery. The experimental group showed a substantial increase in mean scores from the pre-test to the post-test, while the control group demonstrated only limited improvement. This result indicates that cartoon movies provided more effective vocabulary learning experiences compared to conventional teaching methods.

The significant improvement in the experimental group can be attributed to the audiovisual nature of cartoon movies, which combine visual images, spoken language, and contextualized situations. These features helped students understand word meanings, pronunciation, and usage more easily. This finding is consistent with previous studies which reported that cartoon movies and animated videos enhance students' vocabulary acquisition and motivation (Furqan & Shabir, 2021; Maliang, 2023; Matulesy & Kahar, 2024).

Furthermore, the use of cartoon movies aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning, contextual instruction, and differentiated learning. Through cartoon movies, students were actively engaged in the learning process, participated in discussions, and practiced vocabulary in meaningful contexts. In contrast, students in the control group who were taught using conventional methods such as memorization and textbook exercises showed lower engagement and less improvement.

Therefore, the findings confirm that cartoon movies are an effective instructional media for teaching vocabulary. This study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of cartoon movies for seventh-grade students within the Indonesian junior high school context and supports the integration of audiovisual media in vocabulary instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the use of cartoon movies is effective in enhancing the vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 12 Palu. The findings confirm that cartoon movies can be implemented as an alternative instructional medium in vocabulary teaching for junior high school students. The use of this medium supports a more engaging learning process and facilitates students' vocabulary development in classroom settings. Therefore, incorporating cartoon movies into English instruction is recommended to support vocabulary learning, particularly within student-centered and contextual learning environments.

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