

## IMPROVING VOCABULARY MASTERY THROUGH HANGMAN GAME TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** This article is dealing with a classroom action research held in English class about the implementation of Hangman game to improve the fifth grade students' vocabulary mastery and class situation. The method used in this research is an action research. This research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle includes four stages: planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The research data were collected by using techniques of observation, interview, notes/journals, documents, and tests. The qualitative data were analyzed through assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistic. The research findings show that Hangman game could improve: (1) the students' mastery in understanding the meaning of words; (2) the students' mastery in spelling words; (3) the students' mastery in pronouncing the words; (4) the students' mastery in using the words based on the context given; and (5) English class situation.

**Keywords:** Classroom action research, vocabulary mastery, Hangman game, elementary school

In learning English, vocabulary plays an important role in learning a language. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing together. Considering the importance of vocabulary role in learning foreign language, the mastery of this element should be ensured and developed.

The goal of the research is improving the fifth grade students' vocabulary mastery and making an improvement of vocabulary class situation. For elementary school students, mastering vocabulary means students must understand the meaning of a word, then they should also be able to speak and write that word

correctly, and using the word according to the context given.

Vocabulary is a list or set of words for a particular language or a list or set of words that individual speakers of a language might use (Hatch and Brown, 1995: 1). It means vocabulary is a series of words used by individual speakers of certain language. Since vocabulary is a list, the only system involved is alphabetical order in dictionaries. Here, vocabulary is written in alphabetical order in dictionaries based on the system or rule of the foreign language. According to Schmitt (1997: 40), vocabulary is a basis of a language; it is very important to be mastered first. People cannot speak well and understand written

materials if they do not master it. He adds that no matter how successfully the sound of the foreign language is mastered, without words to express the wider range of meanings, communication in a foreign language just cannot happen in any meaningful way. According to Ur (1998: 60) vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. It means vocabulary is written or spoken unit of language as symbol of idea in foreign language introduced to learners. If a teacher teaches new words in foreign language, it means the teacher teaches vocabulary.

Webster dictionary (2003: 1400) has three definitions of vocabulary as follows: (a) a list or collection of words and phrases usually alphabetically arranged and explained or define; (b) a list or collection of terms or codes available for use; and (c) a sum or stock of word employed by a language group, individual or work or in a field knowledge.

There are two types of vocabulary; active and passive vocabulary. Harmer (1991: 150) states that active vocabulary is the stocks of words which have been taught by the teacher or learnt by the students and which are expected to be able to use. On the other hand, passive vocabulary is the words of which the students will recognize when they meet them, but of which they will probably not be able to pronounce.

Harmer (1991: 156-158) points out several aspects in knowing a word that are needed to be taught by the teacher, these are: (a) meaning, (b) word use, (c) word formation, and (d) word grammar. Ur (1996: 60-62) also provides six aspects that are needed to be taught by the teacher: form: pronunciation and spelling, grammar, collocation, aspects of meaning (1): denotation, connotation, appropriateness,

aspects of meaning (2): meaning relationships, and word formation.

In conclusion, based on the scope of this research, vocabulary mastery is students' competency to comprehend the meaning of certain words, produce those words in separate individual form both written and oral; and identify the proper word use based on the context.

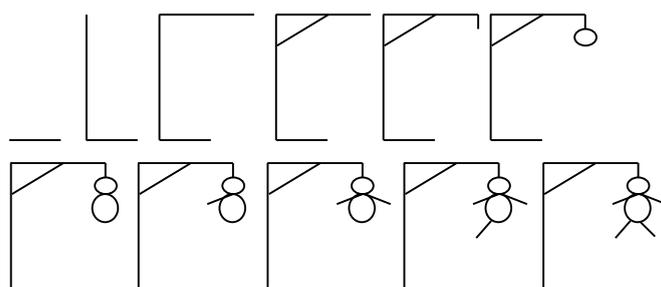
Based on the pre-research conducted in the fifth grade of elementary school, it was found that most of the students have problems in vocabulary mastery as indicated by the following indicators: (1) The students get difficulties to remember the meaning of words. They often forgot the meaning of a word after the teaching learning process; (2) the students get difficulties to spell vocabulary correctly. For example, they spell 'samer' for 'summer'; (3) the students get difficulties to pronounce English word. For example, they pronounce /klodi/ instead of /klaudi/ for the word 'cloudy'; and (4) the students get difficulties to use the word properly. Some students could not identify the proper function of word although the context was given.

In addition, the situation in the vocabulary class is not fulfillable as indicated by following indicators: (1) Students are too talkative during the lesson and make the class noisy; (2) the students cannot keep their focus on the lesson; (3) the students are passive in class; (4) the students bother their friends during the lesson; (5) the students are not eager to write the material on their books.

The problems faced by the students are caused by some factors that may come from the students, the teacher, media, or technique used in teaching and learning process: (1) The students are less interested in the teaching learning process. They feel that English is the most difficult lesson to

be learned; (2) the students are not brave to express their ideas. They are afraid if they make a mistake, their friends will laugh at them; (3) the teacher conducts less communicative class; (4) the teacher does not master the material well. When the researcher interviews the teacher, suddenly the teacher says that she does not understand English well, she only teaches the students by following the material in the book; (5) the teacher is not able to optimize media. The teacher never uses anything as media; (6) the teacher is not able to use variation techniques. She does not have any idea of what technique should be implemented in English class; (7) English in SD Negeri 1 Bangsri is as self-development material. The Wonogiri government changes English from Local Content (*Muatan Lokal*) to Self-Development Material (*Materi Pengembangan Diri*). Therefore, English in SD Negeri 1 Bangsri is considered not an important lesson; and (8) the classroom environment is very noisy. The class is very close to the *gamelan* skill room.

Considering the problems in mastering vocabulary encountered by the students above, the writer proposes a teaching technique of using the Hangman game in teaching vocabulary as a solution. The Hangman game is one of the guessing games. One player thinks of a word, phrase, or sentence and the other tries to guess it by suggesting letters. Webster's online dictionary defines the Hangman game as a guessing game where one has to guess the word an opponent is thinking of by guessing one letter at a time, and involving the gradual drawing of a stick figure hanging from the gallows. In addition, Wright et al (2006: 111) classifies the Hangman game as a game that focuses on vocabulary and spelling. He gives the procedure to play the Hangman game as follows: (a) Think of a word that should be familiar to the learners, and draw a dash for each letter; (b) invite the learners to call out letters which they think may be in the word; and (c) if a learner guesses correctly, write the letter above the appropriate dash. For each incorrect guess, draw one part of the hanged man as in the illustration.



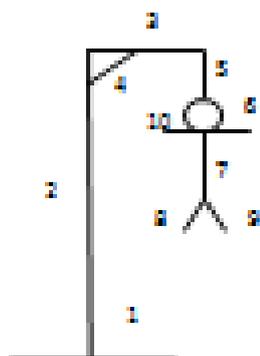
Meanwhile, Greenall (1988: 84) explains the Hangman game as a word game and he puts it in his eighth chapter entitled Play on Words. He classifies the Hangman game as a game for elementary level and the procedure to play the Hangman game are:

students say one letter each. If the letter is contained in the word, it is marked in its correct position above the dash. If the

(a) Form groups of four or five. Ask one person in each group to think of a word of not less than seven letters, and then make the number of letters with a series of dashes. In turn, the other

letter is not contained in the word, a line representing part of the gallows (see below) is drawn. (b) Each time a student guesses a

letter which does not occur in the word, further part is added to the gallows in the order marked below. There are ten parts to the gallows and if there are ten wrong guesses, the person who thought of the word wins a point.



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Some modifications to game play to increase difficulty level are sometimes facilitated, such as limiting guesses on high-frequency consonants and vowels. Another alternative is to give the definition of the word. This can be used to facilitate the learning of a foreign language.

Meanwhile, Ur (1998: 31) gives the instruction to play hangman game as follows (a) One player thinks of a word and writes down a series dashes, which represent the series of letters that make up the word; (b) the other players then guess what the letters are; (c) if they guess a letter right, the first player has to fill it in on the relevant dash (es); (d) if they guess a letter wrong, he or she may draw one (more) component of a drawing of a man hanging on a gallows; (e) the guesses continue until either the whole word has been guessed, or the hangman drawing has been finished; (f) if the first player completes the drawing before the other has guessed the word, he or she wins, and may choose other words to be guessed; (g) if the word is guessed first, then the player to fill in the last letter(s) of the word may choose the next.

Thus, it can be concluded that Hangman game is a word guessing game where one has to guess the word an opponent is thinking of by guessing one letter at a time, and involving the gradual drawing of a stick figure hanging from the gallows.

Hangman game is a great help in stimulating in learning foreign language particularly in teaching of vocabulary. This involves guessing letters to reveal a word or phrase. After a certain number of incorrect guesses, a character onscreen is "hanged". The hanging can take the many forms. Hangman game offers a challenge that will motivate the students to try to guess word based on the theme. It is an excellent way to practice spelling, increase vocabulary, and keep the mind focus on teaching learning process.

In this research, the researcher implements Hangman game to

improve the fifth grade of Elementary School students' vocabulary mastery. The procedure that the researcher uses are: (a) the students and teacher determine the theme of vocabulary (for example: weather and seasons); (b) the students are divided into 6 groups (each groups consist of 7 students) by the teacher; (c) one student in each group is asked to choose a word or picture that has been given by the teacher and then makes the number of letters with a series of dashes. The students who choose the picture are forced to know the name of the picture; it means Hangman game could improve the indicator of meaning; (d) in turn, the other groups guess the letters of the word one by one based on the clue/s given by the person who chooses the word. The students are asked to guess the word correctly in spelling; (e) if the letter is contained the word, it is marked in its correct position above the dash; (f) If they guess a letter wrongly, the teacher may draw one component of a drawing of a man hanging on a gallows (it is presented in the projector); (g) Each time a student guesses a letter which does not occur in the word, further part is added to complete the drawing of a man hanging on a gallows. There are ten parts to the gallows and if there are ten wrong guesses, the student who chooses the word wins a point. If one of the groups can guess the word correctly, the group wins a point; (h) after the word can be guessed, the

students and the teacher spell together the word correctly; (i) then, the students and the teacher pronounce the word correctly; (j) after pronouncing words correctly, the students are asked to connect the word/s that related to the word. Here, the students are asked to give their opinion on the appropriate context with the word. With these activities, students have used the word in context.

By playing Hangman game, students can expand their vocabulary through playing with words. Studies have shown that word play makes students more active and they enjoy learning. In this strategy the mind is entangled. The learners improve their memory, orthography, reasoning, and spelling as well as increase their problem solving skills.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The method used in this study is classroom action research. Burns (1994) in Burns (1999: 30) defines action research is the application of fact finding to practical problem solving in a social situation with a view to improve the quality of action within it, involving the collaboration and cooperation of researchers, practitioners, and laymen. In addition, Carr and Kemmis in Burns (1999:30) states that action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social

situation in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of this practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out. Similarly, Hopkins (1983:1) says that classroom research is an act undertaken by teachers either to improve their own or a colleague's teaching or to test the assumptions of educational theory in practice.

In this classroom action research, the writer uses the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart in Burns (1999: 32). Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1998) in Burns (1999: 32) state that Action Research occurs through a dynamic and complementary process, which consists of four fundamental steps in a spiraling process. They are 1) Identifying problem and planning the action; 2) Implementing the action; 3) Observing the action; 4) Reflecting the result of the observation.

This action research which concerns on using Hangman game in teaching vocabulary needs some data to be analyzed. The researcher collects the data using qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative data were

collected from observation, interviews, and field notes. The quantitative data was collected from the students' vocabulary score obtained from test.

In analyzing qualitative data, the researcher used descriptive analysis proposed by Burns (1999: 157-160) which consists of 1) assembling the data. The researcher collected all the data over the period of the research: field-notes, journal entries, questionnaires and so on; 2) coding the data. The researcher categorizes or codes the data which can be developed to identify patterns more specifically; 3) comparing the data. The researcher compares the data. 4) building interpretations. It is the point where moving beyond describing, categorizing, coding, and comparing to make some sense of the meaning of the data; and 5) reporting the outcomes. In this stage, the researcher presents an account of the research for others. In analyzing the quantitative data, the researcher used descriptive statistics formula. The improvement can be seen if the mean score in post-test is higher than mean score in pre-test.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

After implementing Hangman game to improve students' vocabulary mastery, the

researcher got some results dealing with both vocabulary mastery and class situation. The results are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. The students' improvement in vocabulary mastery

Aspects	Spelling	Using	Meaning	Pronunciation	Mean score
<b>Passing Grade</b>	<b>7.00</b>	<b>7.00</b>	<b>7.00</b>	<b>7.00</b>	<b>7.00</b>
Pre-Test	7.48	5.52	4.96	4.29	53.41
Post-Test 1	9.76	6.93	8.04	7.21	76.83
Post-Test 2	9.80	9.05	8.92	8.19	87.62

Table 1 presents the students' improvement in vocabulary mastery. Before action, it was shown that the students had problem in vocabulary mastery. The students' mean score of pre-test did not pass the passing grade that was 70. After the implementation of Hangman game in cycle 1, it was found that the students got improvement in their mean score, although there were only three indicators that fulfill the passing grade. Then, after cycle 2, the finding showed that the score of the students' vocabulary mastery increased. Almost all vocabulary mastery indicators scores fulfilled the passing grade of each indicator. From the improvement, it can be seen that the students' vocabulary mastery was improved by Hangman game. As stated by Rixon in Brumfit (1995: 33), it is a commonplace that young children learn better through play or at least can be induced to go

along with teaching that is tempered by 'fun' activities.

In the second cycle, the students also were able to use the word correctly based on the context given. Khan in Brumfit (1995: 142) states, "*children play and children want to play. Children learn through playing. In playing together, children interact and in interacting they develop language skills. Games provide contexts for play, reasons for playing and routines for playing.*" It means that since the children naturally want to play the game, it is clear then that games can be motivating them. In addition, the students also got improvement in spelling and pronouncing the word correctly.

The students' improvement was not only found in students' vocabulary mastery but also in class situation. The improvements are presented in the Table 2.

Table 2. The students' improvement in class situation

Before Action	After Cycle 1	After Cycle 2
Students are too talkative during the lesson and make the class noisy.	Some students were still noisy and difficult to control.	Students were easier to control.
The students cannot keep their focus on the lesson.	Students were involved in fun activities. They got busy competing answer questions, so they were kept their focus during the lesson.	Students were involved in Hangman game. They got busy competing answer questions, so they were kept their focus during the lesson.
The students are passive in class.	Since the students involved in Hangman game, they were kept active during the lesson. However, some students still shy to answer the questions.	Students were kept active during the lesson. They competed to answer the questions.
Students bother their friends during the lesson.	Some students bothered their friends during the lesson.	Some students bothered their friends during the lesson. But, they could be controlled to pay attention to the lesson again.
Students are not eager to write the material on their books.	Instead of being forced to write the material, students felt more interesting to do fun activities related to the material.	Instead of being forced to write the material, students felt more interesting to do fun activities related to the material.

Based on the Table 2, it can be seen that there are positive improvement in class situation after the implementation of Hangman game in vocabulary class. The improvements occurred in all aspects of class situation.. Before the implementation of Hangman game, the students looked bored and did not pay attention to the teacher in English class. After the implementation, the students looked enthusiastic when they were asked about vocabulary.

The different result of the research between cycle one and cycle two occurred because the researcher made some revised plans in order to make the cycle two better. The revised plans were made based on the negative reflections toward the implementation of cycle one. the researcher revised her plan that would be conducted in the second cycle. The plans were: (a) dividing the focus on delivering material, in first meeting focus on 3 aspects of vocabulary mastery, they were

spelling, meaning, and pronunciation. While in second meeting, the focus on aspect of using (b) the teacher should deliver the material more interestingly to make the students motivated, and (c) giving more exercise in aspect of using. The researcher gave different materials in two cycles. In cycle 1, the material was Weather and Seasons, while in cycle 2 the material was Kind of Shapes.

Comparing to the class situation before the research, there were some positive progresses. The students were firstly still noisy and difficult to control. But then, they became easier to control. The use of Hangman game in the class could make the students kept active during the lesson. They competed to answer the questions. Students were involved in Hangman game. They got busy competing answer questions, so they were kept their focus during the lesson.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Hangman game can improve the students' vocabulary mastery. The students had positive progress in vocabulary indicators as mentioned in the research findings. The improvement in meaning indicator made the students better in memorizing vocabulary. Most of the students also could correctly spell vocabularies. Errors and mistakes could be reduced through students' experiences. Most of the students could pronounce vocabularies correctly. There were only few students who still made minor errors in pronouncing words. Students also could identify the proper word use based on the context given. The result of the test supports the statement. Students' pre-test mean score is low, which is 53.41. This score is below the school passing grade, which is 70. The mean score improves since the post-test 1. The mean score of post- test 1 is 76.83 and it improves again in post- test 2 which is 87.62.

The use of Hangman game to teach vocabulary also improves the situation during the teaching learning process. The class was conducted in fun atmosphere. They had a great enthusiasm and motivation toward the lesson, paid full attention to the teacher, and got more confidence to show their ideas or answer. By more involving students in interesting class activities supported by Hangman game, it can decrease students' boredom in the learning process. This helps teachers more easily manage the class to be conducive.

Having concluded the result of the research, the researcher would like to propose some suggestions for the teacher and the institutions. For the teacher, Hangman game is one of the alternative techniques to make a fun atmosphere during teaching and learning process in a classroom. The teachers who want to implement this game are required to give instruction clearly to the students. In playing Hangman game, there are several steps that must be understood. Therefore, the teacher should make sure that the students clearly understand the way or the rule in playing Hangman game. It is suggested to use some pictures related to the theme of Hangman game, thus the students can understand the step more easily. For the institution, Hangman game requires some facilities such as LCD projector, speaker, and laptop. The institution can provide those facilities so that Hangman game can be done successfully in teaching- learning process. In addition, the institution can give some training of playing Hangman game to the English teachers.

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