



IMPROVING VOCABULARY MASTERY OF SIXTH-GRADE STUDENTS THROUGH THE INDEX CARD MATCH STRATEGY AT SDN 8 GEDANGAN.

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Abstract

This study focused on addressing the issues of low vocabulary mastery, lack of motivation, and lack of involvement by utilizing the Index Card Match (ICM) strategy to improve vocabulary mastery, retention, motivation, and participation in group interactive learning. The caveat is that a Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted to find out if the Index Card Match (ICM) strategy was effective in improving vocabulary mastery with 16 sixth grader students at SDN 8 Gedangan with an administration of study from two cycles consisting of an initial and cycle tests, observation, questionnaire, rubrics, and passing successful identified by the scores rated ≥ 70 and participants demonstrated improvement with vocabulary retention, motivation, participation and engagement. The two-cycle Classroom Action Research (CAR) results found improved proficiency of sixth graders' vocabulary mastery at SDN 8 Gedangan using the Index Card Match strategy from the initial and cycle tests, observation, and questionnaire reported, included an average score of 54.0 (6.25%) to 74.1 (100%). Active participation improved from (50%) to (90%), and positive feedback reported from (70%) to (96%) showed more motivation, engagement, and retention with vocabulary. Future applicability of the Index Card Match strategy method should attempt to include illustrations in context with Technology; provide teacher training on index card match; and investigate of bigger cohort population, the length of time for intervention, and other skills/subjects.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Mastery; Index Card Match; Classroom Action Research; Sixth-Grade Students; English Language Learning; Primary Education*

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INTRODUCTION

In learning English as a foreign language, students must acquire four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Vocabulary underpins all these skills (Manda et al., 2022). Speaking, writing, and reading require students to know vocabulary to communicate ideas, understand texts, and recognize author intent. Likewise, vocabulary plays a prominent role during listening, as knowing and understanding vocabulary helps students understand speakers' or teachers' messages. Vocabulary is the base from which students can develop their mastery of all English language skills. Vocabulary is a major part of learning a language and a primary resource used by students to construct sentences. However, despite the importance of vocabulary in teaching English as a foreign language, research on vocabulary teaching—especially for young learners—shows students' mastery of vocabulary is not satisfactory (Noviya H, 2021). In Indonesian primary schools, students learning English face considerable challenges influenced by limited vocabulary knowledge, low motivation, and ineffective teaching strategies that promote engagement. All of these challenges highlight a need for innovative teaching strategies that can develop students' mastery of vocabulary while also enhancing student interest and participation.

At SDN 8 *Gedangan*, the teacher identified a serious problem with sixth-grade students' vocabulary mastery. Most students did not understand or remember English words well, considered English difficult and boring, and were uninterested in participating in lessons. In a pre-research vocabulary test, only one out of 16 students passed, with an average score of 54, which is below the school's minimum passing score of 70. In class, students were often inattentive, played with friends, and rarely engaged actively in learning activities.

The solution to the previous issues was a strategy called Index Card Match (ICM). It is a vocabulary game that gets the students to match words with their corresponding meanings or pictures. This engaging activity is used to make vocabulary learning more enjoyable and help students to easily remember new vocabulary while also refreshing the classroom. Several previous studies also support the use of ICM to



implement learning. For example, the research examining the impact of the Index Card Match learning model on students' motivation to learn, through a review of educational literature, journals, and Classroom Action Research, demonstrates that the Index Card Match model fosters a joy of learning, which in turn motivates writing (Ikrom & Hidayah, 2021). Similarly, another literature study confirmed that the ICM method positively influences learning motivation by fostering a lively and engaging classroom environment, making it an effective tool for sustaining student interest (Chusnul Ramadhani Tyas, 2022).

Additionally, a quasi-experimental study examined the impact of the Index Card Match learning model on enhancing students' educational outcomes through a nonequivalent control group approach. Analysis of pretest and posttest data showed a significant difference between the experimental and control classes, with a Sig. (2-tailed) value of $0.000 < 0.05$. The findings indicate that the Index Card Match model effectively enhances students' learning outcomes compared to conventional methods (Larasati, 2024). Similarly, a study examining the effectiveness of the ICM method in improving the vocabulary mastery of second-grade students at Junior High School Handayani 1 Banjaran employed a pre-experimental design with 30 participants. The research involved pre-tests, treatment, post-tests, and questionnaires, revealing significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores as well as positive responses toward the method. These findings confirm that ICM is both effective and engaging in vocabulary learning (Kusnandar, A., & Rachmawati, 2024).

The flexibility of the ICM strategy is also proven in other subject areas. In Islamic Religious Education, a Classroom Action Research project using the Index Card Match method aimed to improve studying Hadith for 10 third-grade students at SDN 2 *Motabang*, the results of which indicated improvement; the completion rate went up from 40% in Cycle I to 85.71% in Cycle II. Students had become active and enthusiastic, which suggests the method had improved both engagement and learning outcomes (Papatungan, 2023). Similarly, another study implemented the ICM method to improve the learning outcomes of Grade IV students in Islamic Religious Education



using the *Asmaul Husna* material at SDN 05 *Rantau Utara*. The learning process involved clear explanations, collaborative activities, reinforcement of material, and reflective evaluation, resulting in a significant increase in average scores from 46.15 to 77.24 and learning completion reaching 92.31% by the end of the second cycle (Hartato, 2023). Supporting this, classroom action research aimed at improving student learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education also demonstrated that the ICM method, assessed through tests and classroom observations, effectively enhanced learning outcomes and served as a viable alternative for improving instructional quality in the subject (Mariati, 2024). Furthermore, an experimental study examined the effect of the ICM method on increasing student activity and learning outcomes, showing that average scores rose from 53.50 (pre-test) to 77.10 (post-test), with a t-test value of $10.32 > 2.093$ and an effect size of 0.94, which is high. This confirms the strong positive impact of ICM on student learning (Karyono, 2023).

The adaptability of the ICM method is further supported by its successful application in teaching history. For instance, a study applied the Index Card Match strategy to teach the proclamation of Indonesian independence and the formation of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia to students at MAN 2 Bojonegoro. The method, which involves pairing questions and answers on index cards, aimed to increase student activeness and improve learning outcomes. Results showed an improvement from 67.74% completion in Cycle I to 85.91% in Cycle II, indicating the strategy's effectiveness (Silviana Rochmatin, 2022). Similarly, in a qualitative study on Islamic Religious Education for Grade IV students at SD Negeri 47 Lebong, the use of the ICM active learning model was found to improve both students' cognitive learning outcomes and their collaborative skills. The results exceeded the target indicator, with 90% of students achieving the minimum mastery criteria of ≥ 80 , surpassing the 80% goal (Sasmita, 2023).

This study's goal is to look into how the ICM technique can be used to help sixth-grade students at SDN 8 *Gedangan* enhance their vocabulary skills. This study's goal is to look into how the ICM technique can be used to help sixth-grade students at



SDN 8 *Gedangan* enhance their vocabulary skills. The objective is to determine its effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary skills and to examine how such interactive methods can promote engagement, motivation, and better learning outcomes in English language instruction.

Though there is ample support from previous studies for the effectiveness of the ICM strategy to improve learning on many diverse subjects and educational levels, studies that investigate the use of ICM to improve English vocabulary mastery among sixth-grade primary school students are limited. Most vocabulary studies exist at the secondary school level or happen in subjects where students are already moderately engaged and participatory. There are few to no studies that deal with ESL learning among students with low baseline vocabulary knowledge, low motivation, and negative attitudes towards English learning, like the primary school students during the study done at SDN 8 *Gedangan*. This presents a unique opportunity to explore the possibility of ICM as an interactive strategy to improve vocabulary mastery and student engagement in the classroom.

It is important to rectify this gap because vocabulary acquisition is an underpinning aspect of students' ability to use English effectively in order to support their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. When students are in settings such as SDN 8 *Gedangan* where students often continue to struggle to learn English because of low motivation, minimal retention of new words, and low-stakes interest in their studies, the traditional teaching style often does not inspire the positive change that we want to see. If we introduce an interactive method such as the Index Card Match method, we could motivate students to engage in vocabulary practice more positively and collaboratively, while also supporting retention in the long run. In the case of sixth-grade students in the researched setting, this study can add to our knowledge of ICM and language learning, and thus help teachers to think of ways to engage students positively in a similar issue in primary school English teaching.

Therefore, it is assumed that the Index Card Match strategy will positively assist students in mastering vocabulary through a more interactive and entertaining ambience



within the classroom. The majority of the outcomes were increased motivation for students, retention of vocabulary, and participation in English lessons. Additionally, this study can provide practical knowledge for teachers who want engaging vocabulary teaching resources, especially in the elementary context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to investigate the effectiveness of the Index Card Match (ICM) strategy in improving vocabulary mastery among sixth-grade students at SDN 8 *Gedangan*. The research followed the collaborative CAR model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which consists of four systematic stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The research was conducted in two cycles to ensure that improvements and revisions could be made based on reflection from each cycle.

This research is about vocabulary mastery in English of sixth-grade students at SDN 8 *Gedangan*, teaching students how to know, understand, remember, and use vocabulary in English, and the use of the Index Card Match (ICM) strategy to improve vocabulary mastery through fun and cooperative learning activities. This study was conducted in the odd semester of the 2024/2025 school year at SDN 8 *Gedangan*, a public primary school located in *Gedangan* District, Malang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. 16 sixth-grade students were selected because of their low vocabulary achievement, who had an initial average score for the vocabulary test of only 54. The Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) of SDN 8 *Gedangan* is 70, therefore indicating their use of vocabulary is low/or the accepted minimum education standard. In addition, since the researcher was also the class teacher of the subjects, he had immediate access to the participants and their growth potential, challenges, and outcomes during the study.

The study began by conducting a preliminary study to determine students' difficulties in vocabulary mastery, which shows a lack of vocabulary knowledge, a lack of motivation, a lack of active involvement, lack of retention for new words. In Cycle I, Index Card Match (ICM) was implemented during three instructional meetings. The



students worked in pairs to match cards (question and answer cards) as it relates to the theme "Places Around Us," followed by a vocabulary quiz.

The study utilized a variety of data collection techniques, consisted of tests (initial tests and cycle tests) to evaluate the student's vocabulary mastery initial and post-cycle, observation sheets, and field notes to observe the events of the class and capture student actions and participation, questionnaires to measure students' attitudes and motivation toward using the Index Card Match strategy, and behavioral scoring rubrics focused on behavioral indicators such as enthusiasm, attention, and collaboration with others. Data were analyzed using quantitative data based on test scores and qualitative data based on observation data or student responses. The criteria for success were set as having all students achieve a score of 70 or higher, and also to demonstrate observable increased motivation and participation during the vocabulary lesson, as well as significant vocabulary learning by students.

In the study, two categories of criteria were used to determine whether Index Card Match was effective: score-based success and behavioral and participation-based success. In the first category, score-based success, the students had to achieve the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) of 70. In the second category, behavioral and participation-based success, students needed to be active, confident, and focused participants in an active learning strategy, which was assessed through observation of the students and through questionnaires that assessed enjoyment and participation in group work in terms of attentiveness and group work performance.

RESULTS

In the research study, the Index Card Match (ICM) strategy was conducted in two cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection to improve the vocabulary mastery of sixth grade students of SDN 8 Gedangan. The preliminary study prior to the first cycle suggested that vocabulary mastery was low, as of the 16 students in the classroom, only 1 student or 6.25 % of the population reached the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) with a score of 70 or above which resulted in a class mean of 54. The



classroom observations also indicated the students were rather passive in lessons, not showing considerable levels of interest, and tended to forget quickly newly learned vocabulary items. It was clear that there was a need for something more engaging and interactive, and the ICM strategy provided an opportunity to teach the students.

1. Cycle I Results

In Cycle I, the ICM strategy was introduced across three instructional meetings, followed by a vocabulary quiz. Students worked in pairs to match vocabulary word cards with corresponding definitions or pictures.

Table 1. Cycle I Vocabulary Mastery Results

Category	Cycle I
Total Students	16
Students Passed KKM	7
Passing Percentage	43.75%
Average Score	68.1

Cycle I test results show that 7 of 16 students (43.75%) scored 70 or above, with an average class score of 68.1, showing an increase of 14 points from the baseline. Students exhibited more participation, confidence, and involvement in class, yet many struggled with spelling and contextual usage of vocabulary. Some students were confused by the matching task, and others needed even more support from the teacher, and still lost the memory of definitions quickly. Based on these results, the teacher wanted to continue to adjust the strategy for Cycle II by simplifying the material, giving a more specific description of the tasks, providing students with greater support and allowing them additional time to work with the cards.

2. Behavioral and Participation Results

During Cycle I, we observed differences in mood and engagement amongst students; improvements were not seen for all learners in this cycle; however, there were indications of some movement. The observational data indicated some students were



excited about the use of the cards at the Index Card Match, as they had never used anything like that before, with about 50% engaged in matching cards and talking about the vocabulary with their partner. Many students did not seem to be engaged in matching cards, were confused, were shy, or needed further help, while some were just playing with their cards, and others were waiting without completing anything. Class participation also increased with students who were maintaining greater awareness of their peers, actively contributing to discussions, laughing, discussing words with co-partners, completing their pieces of the activity, and helping each other out. However, lagging in participation, confidence, and encouragement still varied; some were still clearly hesitant. Although we saw positive indications of engagement, motivation levels, and collaboration for the classroom behavior evaluations, not all learning objectives were achieved. Ultimately, although the positive behavior adaptations were met in Cycle I, behavioral expectations were only achieved at a partial level; further adaptations in instructional delivery and behavioral expectations need to continue to be developed throughout the next cycle.

3. Cycle II Results

Cycle II was designed to address the weaknesses of Cycle I. Adjustments included simplifying vocabulary tasks, improving card clarity, allocating more time for discussion, and increasing teacher scaffolding.

Table 2. Cycle II Vocabulary Mastery Results

Category	Cycle I
Total Students	16
Students Passed KKM	16
Passing Percentage	100%
Average Score	74.1



In Cycle II, all 16 students (100%) have achieved or exceeded the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), and the average class score improved to 74.1, which represents a dramatic increase from both the initial results and from Cycle I. Students were more accurate with spelling, context use, and were more confident when using the vocabulary in classroom activities. Observations and survey results even showed that 96% of students said they liked the learning process and found the Index Card Match strategy effective in producing understanding and retention of new vocabulary. This indicates that the intervention was effective for both academic and affective outcomes.

4. Behavioral and Participation Results

In Cycle II, the researcher improved the teaching steps by providing more specific instructions, simplifying the cards, and allowing more time for group work. The outcome improved greatly: more than 90% of students engaged in the activity, helping each other find answers, asking questions, and showing visible excitement. Many students who normally would not have engaged (being shy or quiet) were more confident, worked well in pairs, and volunteered to engage in whole class sharing when previously quiet (might have been "butterflies in stomach" type of shy or anxious at least). Moreover, students were able to pay attention, work cooperatively, and were motivated to engage with their learning. Many students raised their hands and answered questions.

The questionnaire results revealed 96% of students enjoyed the learning activity (more than any other semester) and that it was helpful to their process of learning and remembering the new vocabulary and concepts. The teacher had also observed that as the lessons progressed, the students were able to recall vocabulary more readily, paired their words more efficiently, and as the students had all engaged and considered a "full" day's class, that made for a more enjoyable, focused classroom and activities. Therefore, the behavioral criteria and participation would be considered achieved in full measure in Cycle II.

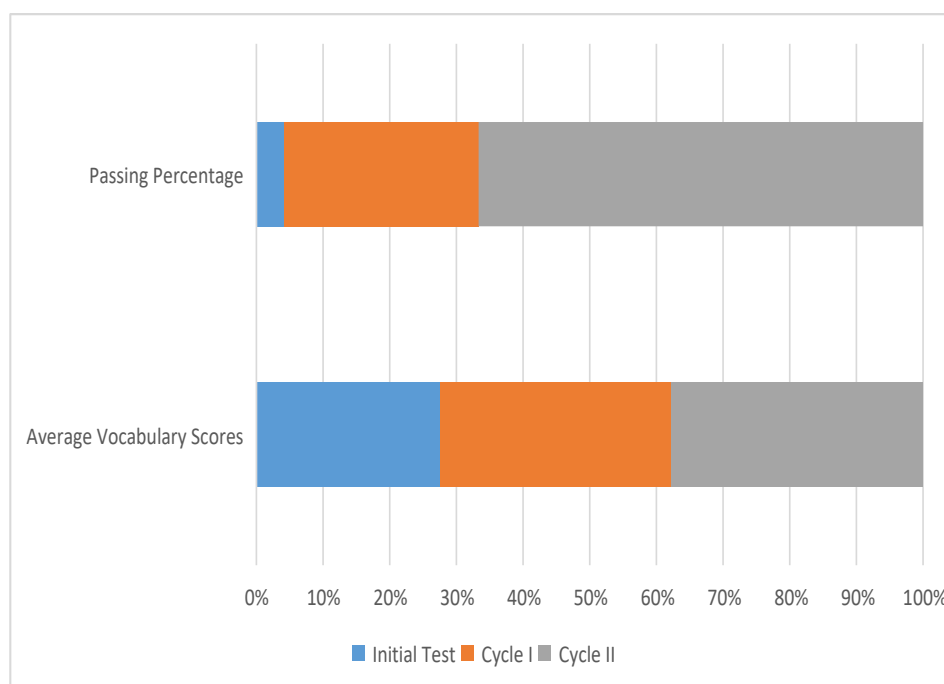


Table 3. Summary of Students' Vocabulary Mastery from Preliminary Study, Cycle I, and Cycle II

Stage	Average Score	Students Reaching KKM	Percentage
Preliminary Study	54.0	1/16	6.25%
Cycle I	68.1	7/16	43.75%
Cycle II	74.1	16/16	100%

These results confirm that the ICM strategy significantly improved vocabulary mastery, especially when refined and implemented consistently.

Chart 1. Summary of Students' Vocabulary Mastery from Preliminary Study, Cycle I, and Cycle II

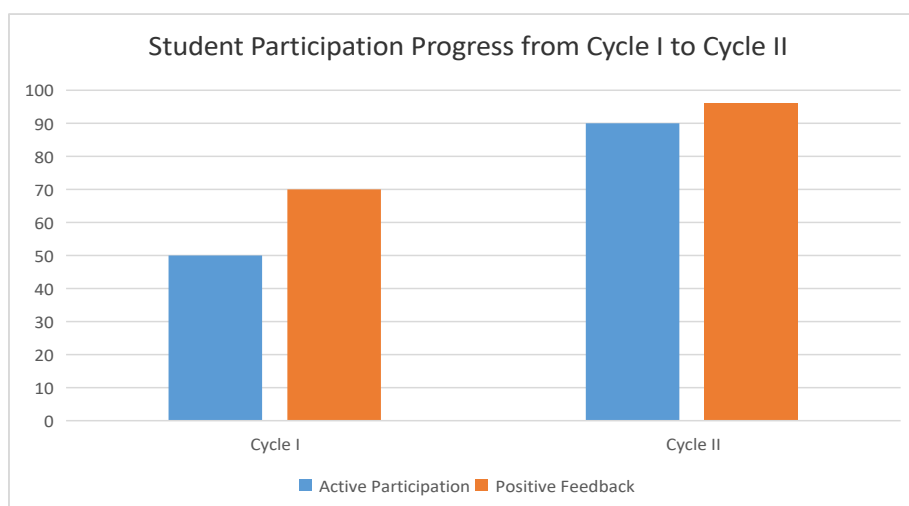


Two graphs show the increase in average vocabulary mastery scores among students across the research cycles. The first graph shows Average Vocabulary Scores, which continued to increase from the preliminary test average of 54.0 to Cycle I of 68.1



and Cycle II of 74.1. The second graph demonstrates that the percentage of students who met the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) increased from 6.25% in the initial test to 43.75% in Cycle I, and 100% in Cycle II. These results demonstrate that the Index Card Match strategy positively impacted both average scores as well as the number of students who attained mastery.

Chart 2. Summary of Students' behavioral and participation success across the two cycles



The bar chart shows the improvement in behavioral and participation success over the two cycles. In Cycle I, about 50% of students were actively participating in learning activities, and approximately 70% endorsed positively. By Cycle II, active involvement had increased considerably to 90%, and positive endorsement had increased to 96%. This indicated that the students showed higher levels of activity, concentration, and motivation in the second cycle. The learning environment and the Index Card Match strategy had worked substantially better in terms of interest and participation.



DISCUSSION

The results of this research reveal that among sixth-grade SDN 8 *Gedangan* students, the Index Card Match (ICM) approach greatly enhanced both vocabulary mastery and student engagement. The average vocabulary score academically rose from 54.0 before the intervention to 68.1 in Cycle I and 74.1 in Cycle II. The percentage of students passing (KKM 70) jumped dramatically from 6.25% in the initial study to 43.75% in Cycle I and then 100% in Cycle II. These findings show that every student had total proficiency once the technique was modified, as well as continuous progress. The behavioral improvements were as remarkable; active participation went from 50% to 90%, and good feedback went from 70% to 96%. With even formerly withdrawn or uninterested students actively participating in classes, students grew more confident, cooperative, and attentive. The move from partial success in Cycle I to full success in Cycle II highlights the need to improve teaching delivery by simplifying content, giving clear directions, adding scaffolding, and making more time for group work.

These findings are noteworthy as they take aim at a serious and current learning issue. The students started the research with little knowledge of English, a bad attitude toward English, and low motivation. But with the help of a fun, game-based method, they were able to become really good at English. This result helps to close a significant gap in the current body of knowledge since few studies have used the ICM method to teach vocabulary learning at the primary level, especially with students beginning from such a low starting point. The research gives teachers useful ideas by means of a tried-and-true, affordable technique that improves participation, enjoyment, and vocabulary retention in the classroom. Early vocabulary growth also supports all four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing; therefore, the gains observed here provide a solid platform for long-term success in language learning. The research finally shows that even students who are not very good at learning or who are not interested in it can do well in their studies and become really excited about learning if they use the right active-learning method.



The applicability of the ICM strategy in the improvement of vocabulary mastery is supported by (Farida & Kareviati, 2021), Classroom Action Research at SMPN 4 *Cikalongwetan*, which consisted of 30 students in junior high school. The results indicated a continuous improvement in scores from the Initial test (64.66) to Cycle I (79.33) and Cycle II (83.66), confirming that the ICM strategy can enhance vocabulary mastery through enjoyable learning experiences. Along with the findings of the present study, they both lend supporting evidence that the ICM strategy has flexible applicability and can be effective with various levels and various types of learners. A study of quasi-experimental research at SDN *Slipi 07 Pagi*, in which the researchers examined the effect of the ICM learning model on fifth-grade students' science learning motivation, yielded an average effect size of 1.324, indicating a large, significant positive impact (Zahwa & Erwin, 2022). This not only further supports the conclusion that the ICM model can be utilized to enhance academic performance in terms of vocabulary mastery, but it can also develop motivation across subjects, grade levels, and learning situations. Additionally, a study of Research and Development (R&D) studying developing and try-out student worksheets (LKPD) ICM learning model for Grade VII descriptive text material received the assessment from the material expert (89.23%), design expert (89.33%), and Indonesia language teacher (94%) were categorized in "very feasible" category (Agung Satrio Putro, 2023). The study findings show that ICM model can be utilized and developed in well-designed instructional material; its feasibility is proven by the assessment experts. This finding also indicates that the ICM model is adaptable and can contribute to students' learning effectiveness in new learning environments. Likewise, qualitative study on the implementation of ICM active learning model in Islamic Religion Learning subject in Grade IV elementary at SD Negeri 47 *Lebong* revealed the cognitive achievement and collaborative skill had improved, and 90% of students reached the minimum mastery criteria ($KKM \geq 80$) which exceeded the target success of 80% (Sasmita, 2023). The additional examples also add support to previous findings suggesting that the ICM model reliably improves learning outcomes, development of skills, and engagement across subjects, grade levels,



and school settings. Additionally, a true-experimental study at SMP *Al-Hikmah Marelan* exploring the extent to which the ICM strategy using YouTube media improved listening comprehension, confirmed the experimental group (taught using ICM) performed better than the comparison group, with a post-test score of 86.56 compared to the comparison group of 70.54, with a positive student perception average with the questionnaire of 77.36% (Paisal, 2022). From these findings, it was concluded that the ICM strategy utilizing multimedia was not only more effective than traditional teaching strategies but it was also accepted by students, thus verifying its effectiveness across numerous subjects, skills, and teaching structures. In another study that discussed the effect of the ICM cooperative learning model on vocabulary mastery using action research as a way of exploring the effective use of the ICM cooperative learning model to address vocabulary mastery for sixth grade students at SDN *Bahagia 06* with 20 students, students learning outcomes showed an increase from 70 percent in Cycle 1 to 90 percent in Cycle 2 and 100 percent in Cycle 3, while both observer observation checklist items showed improvement from Cycle 1 moderate, then Cycle 2 good, and Cycle 3 excellent for both observer checklists for teacher and student activities (Indrawati, 2022). This study adds more evidence that the ICM model can also significantly improve engagement, participation, and achievement for students in several contexts and across learner types.

This study has several weaknesses that could limit its findings and impact. Since the sample size was small (16 students from one school), it is difficult to determine the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other environments. The short period of research, restricted to two cycles, may not have fully captured the prolonged effects of the ICM strategy. The researcher also served as the classroom teacher and therefore, could have unconsciously been biased in the researcher's observations and scoring. ICM strategy's research scope focused solely on vocabulary mastery, so this study could not identify the ICM strategy's impact on controlled outcomes such as speaking or writing. As well, uncontrolled factors such as student exposure to English before class or



parents' support to support learning, and student learning styles could have influenced the outcomes.

This research has demonstrated that the Index Card Match (ICM) strategy is a useful one for enhancing vocabulary mastery and can have a wider application in English teaching. Teachers can provide visual supports, as well as real-life examples or digital media, to make learning more engaging while ICM is being conducted. This can mean greater learner engagement, even if schools provide training for their teachers on the use of ICM and resources that can help develop vocabulary. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse group of participants, conducting the study over a longer period, and to examine the ICM approach concerning the enhancement of vocabulary knowledge and engagement, its effect on other language skills (e.g. speaking, reading, writing), the use of ICM in conjunction with technology, or integrating its use in other subjects.

CONCLUSION

According to the main results of this research, the Index Card Match (ICM) method greatly enhanced vocabulary knowledge and student involvement among SDN 8 *Gedangan* sixth-graders. From 54.0 before the intervention to 68.1 in Cycle I and 74.1 in Cycle II, average scores increased; the percentage of students reaching the passing mark rose from 6.25% to 100%. From 50% to 90%, active participation increased, and from 70% to 96%, positive feedback rose, indicating that pupils became more driven, confident, and cooperative. By better defining the ICM plan with simpler materials, more scaffolding, extra time for discussion, and clearer instructions, these improvements were realized.

SUGGESTION

For future applications, teachers can elaborate ICM to various vocabulary lessons along with illustrations, context examples, and technology to keep students engaged and help them retain vocabulary. Educational institutions should provide



teachers and education professionals with training and resources to assist with active learning methods such as ICM. Regarding future research, there could be wider and more diverse sample sizes, longer implementation periods to observe retention, and the possible impact of ICM with all aspects of language such as speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, researchers could examine the adaptation of ICM to other subjects or support active learning with technology-based learning tools.



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