

The Effectiveness of Using Riddle Game on Vocabulary Mastery of The Eighth Grade Students

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Article History

accepted 1/9/2026

approved 14/9/2026

published 21/9/2026

Abstract

English language proficiency relies heavily on vocabulary mastery. Eighth-grade students at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan have demonstrated low learning outcomes, as their English instruction has been limited to rote memorization and direct translation. This study aimed to measure the extent to which riddle game could boost English vocabulary mastery. It employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design specifically, a non-equivalent control group design involving two classes. Data were collected using pre-tests and post-tests. The results showed that the experimental class's mean score rose from 57.00 to 85.00, while the control class's mean score increased from 55.00 to 83.00. The t-test yielded a significance value (sig-2 tailed) of $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating a significant difference between the two classes. These findings confirm that riddle game are superior to conventional methods for building vocabulary in English language learning.

Keywords: Riddle Game, Vocabulary Mastery, English Language Learning

Abstrak

Kemampuan berbahasa inggris sangat bergantung pada penguasaan kosakata. Siswa kelas VIII MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan masih memperlihatkan hasil belajar yang rendah karena dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris hanya menggunakan metode hafalan kata dan terjemahan langsung. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengukur sejauh mana permainan teka-teki mampu mendongkrak penguasaan kosakata bahasa inggris. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kuantitatif dengan desain kuasi-eksperimen yang menggunakan kelompok kontrol nonequivalent, melibatkan dua kelas. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah tes *pretest* dan *posttest*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai rata-rata kelas eksperimen naik dari 57,00 menjadi 85,00, sedangkan kelas kontrol naik dari 55,00 menjadi 83,00. Berdasarkan hasil uji-t diperoleh nilai (sig-2 tailed) sebesar $0,000 < 0,05$, sehingga dapat disimpulkan bahwa terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan antara kedua kelas. Hal ini menegaskan bahwa permainan teka-teki lebih unggul dibandingkan metode konvensional dalam membangun kosakata dalam pembelajaran bahasa inggris.

Kata Kunci: Permainan Teka-teki, Penguasaan Kosakata, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris



INTRODUCTION

Among all the skills that make up language competence—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—vocabulary functions as the building block that holds everything together (Ariani & Marhum, 2025). When vocabulary is limited, learners find it hard to follow what they hear or read, and even harder to put their own ideas, feelings, and thoughts into words (Nurammida & Nizarrahmadi, 2024). Rahmawati et al. (2022) point out that vocabulary sits at the core of language learning itself, since a narrow word bank restricts how much a learner can actually say. Within Indonesia's EFL classrooms, building solid vocabulary knowledge continues to be one of the toughest hurdles learners face across every level of schooling, and this is especially visible among junior high school students (Nadhira & Warni, 2021). The difficulty is not unique to one school; multiple studies point to the same pattern nationwide—many junior high students keep posting weak vocabulary scores because teaching still leans on rote memorization and direct translation instead of meaningful, context-rich practice, leaving learners unable to carry new words beyond the classroom walls (Susanti et al., 2026).

A similar pattern surfaces among eighth graders at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan. Prior to conducting this research, the researcher observed classes and spoke with the English teacher, uncovering that a considerable number of students showed weak vocabulary command, struggled to retain newly taught words, and lacked enthusiasm for vocabulary-building activities (Hasanah et al., 2026). According to the teacher, many students had trouble following reading passages and answering questions simply because they did not recognize the vocabulary involved. A preliminary vocabulary test confirmed this: 20 of the 28 students fell below the school's Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (Kriteria Ketercapaian Tujuan Pembelajaran/KKTP), pointing to a notable gap that called for intervention (Tanjung, 2021).

A number of earlier studies have explored how well riddle games work for building vocabulary. Rahmawati et al. (2022), for instance, tested the riddle game with 60 eighth graders at SMP Al Washliyah 08 Medan, forming experimental and control groups through cluster random sampling. Their *t*-count of 3.05 surpassed the *t*-table value of 2.00, showing that the riddle game made a meaningful difference to students' vocabulary outcomes. The present research diverges from that work by taking place in an Islamic junior high school and by applying a quasi-experimental design built around a clearly structured treatment procedure.

Silviani et al. (2024) ran a quasi-experiment with 67 eighth graders at SMPN 1 Cihara, Lebak Banten, using cluster random sampling to set up a riddle-game class alongside a crossword-puzzle class. Their significance value of 0.000 (below 0.05) showed the riddle game outperforming the crossword puzzle. This study takes a different comparison point, pitting the riddle game against conventional teaching rather than crossword puzzles, and situates the research within an Islamic junior high school. Lorenza (2024) used a pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design with ninth graders at SMPN 1 Bengkulu and likewise found a marked rise in vocabulary mastery following the riddle-game treatment. What sets the current research apart is its focus on eighth graders and its use of a structured, group-based riddle procedure paired with explicit vocabulary indicators.

Even with this considerable body of evidence, no earlier research has examined how the riddle game performs specifically among students at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan, Jepara—which is where the locational novelty of this study lies. Beyond location, the study also brings pedagogical novelty by zeroing in on a defined set of vocabulary indicators: word meaning, word form, contextual usage, and the ability to infer vocabulary from descriptive clues, all examined within an Islamic junior high school (madrasah tsanawiyah) that blends general English instruction with a religion-based

curriculum—a context seldom explored in earlier riddle-game research (Peeva et al., 2021).

Given these gaps, this study frames the Riddle Game as a vocabulary-learning technique situated within Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT was chosen because it treats meaningful, interactive communication as the ultimate goal of learning a language, which aligns naturally with the collaborative, communication-driven nature of the riddle activity. Functioning as a CLT tool, the riddle game has students listening to descriptive clues, discussing possible answers within their groups, and producing vocabulary through genuine communicative exchange—all core elements of CLT practice. The research question guiding this study is: how effective is the riddle game in raising the vocabulary mastery of eighth graders at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan compared with students taught through conventional methods? Accordingly, the study aims to determine the effectiveness of the riddle game in improving the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a quantitative, quasi-experimental approach using a pretest–posttest non-equivalent control group design to gauge how well the Riddle Game, taught within a CLT framework, could raise students' vocabulary mastery (Susanti et al., 2026; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Because random assignment of participants was not feasible, two existing eighth-grade classes at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan were chosen as the study's participants. Class VIII A (28 students; 16 male, 12 female) served as the experimental group and received vocabulary instruction through the Riddle Game under CLT, whereas Class VIII B (26 students; 15 male, 11 female) served as the control group and was taught through the school's conventional method—explanation, translation, and written exercises. Both classes sat for a pre-test before treatment began and a post-test once it ended, allowing the researcher to track vocabulary gains (Febriani et al., 2025).

Participants were chosen through purposive sampling, guided by several practical considerations: class schedules that would not disrupt regular teaching activities, classrooms adequately equipped to run the learning sessions, and the two classes' comparable starting points in English proficiency and learning background (Yuliarsih, 2022). This comparability was further confirmed by the pre-test results, which showed no statistically significant gap between the groups before treatment began.

Data were processed quantitatively with IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Before hypothesis testing, the instrument itself was checked for validity and reliability, and the resulting data were screened for normality and homogeneity to confirm that the requirements for parametric analysis were satisfied. An independent-samples t-test then determined whether the experimental and control groups differed significantly in post-treatment vocabulary mastery, while an N-Gain analysis captured how much each group improved from pretest to posttest. Together, these analyses offered a well-rounded picture of how effective the Riddle Game was in strengthening students' vocabulary (Al Halim & Yaqin, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Data collection took place at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan in Kedung District, Jepara Regency, Central Java. Class VIII A (28 students) formed the experimental group, learning vocabulary through the Riddle Game inside the CLT framework, while Class VIII B (26 students) formed the control group taught through the conventional approach. The quantitative results came from pre-test and post-test scores measuring students' vocabulary achievement. A 30-item multiple-choice pre-test, already validated,

was administered first. After several sessions of treatment, a post-test followed to check whether vocabulary achievement had shifted. All figures were processed through SPSS, and the resulting analysis is presented below.

Instrument validity was assessed in SPSS by comparing each item's r-count against the r-table value at a set significance level. Out of the 30 items trialed, 25 proved valid, since their r-count values exceeded the r-table threshold, while the remaining five were dropped for falling short of that threshold. This indicates that the bulk of the instrument was well-suited for measuring English vocabulary achievement at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan. The subsections below cover the normality test, the homogeneity test, and the t-test.

Table 1. Mean Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Group	Pre-Test	Post-Test	N
Experimental (VIII A)	57.00	85.00	28
Control (VIII B)	55.00	83.00	26

As shown in Table 1, the two groups started from fairly close pre-test averages (57.00 for the experimental class and 55.00 for the control class). After the treatment, both classes improved, with the experimental group reaching an average of 85.00 and the control group reaching 83.00.

1. Normality Test

Normality of the post-test scores for both groups was checked as follows:

Table 2. Normality Test for the Experimental Class (VIII A)

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		Unstandardized Residual
N		28
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	3.67967410
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.116
	Positive	.116
	Negative	-.076
Test Statistic		.116
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200 ^{c,d}
a. Test distribution is Normal.		
b. Calculated from data.		
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.		
d. This is a lower bound of the true significance.		

The table indicates a significance value of 0.200, exceeding the 0.05 threshold ($0.200 > 0.05$). H_0 is therefore retained, confirming that the experimental group's data follow a normal distribution.

Table 3. Normality Test for the Control Class (VIII B)

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		Unstandardized Residual
N		26
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	2.70420548
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.143
	Positive	.143
	Negative	-.106
Test Statistic		.143
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.185 ^c
a. Test distribution is Normal.		
b. Calculated from data.		
c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.		

Similarly, the control group's significance value of 0.185 also exceeds 0.05 ($0.185 > 0.05$), leading to the same conclusion: H_0 is retained, and the control group's data are normally distributed as well. Both groups therefore satisfy the normality assumption required for parametric testing.

2. Homogeneity Test

Homogeneity of the pre-test and post-test scores across both groups was examined next:

Table 4. Homogeneity Test Results Class VIII A

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
PretestPosttest			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
13.005	1	54	.722

The Levene's Test for the experimental group returned a significance value of 0.722, well above 0.05, indicating homogeneous variance and clearing the data for further hypothesis testing.

Table 5. Homogeneity Test Results Class VIII B

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
PretestPosttest			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
5.786	1	50	.514

The control group's Levene's Test likewise produced a significance value of 0.514, exceeding 0.05, confirming homogeneous variance and supporting a valid comparison between the pre-test and post-test data of both groups.

3. Independent Samples T-Test

The decision regarding post-test differences between the two groups rests on the following table:

Table 6. Independent Samples T-Test Results

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Hasil Belajar	Equal variances assumed	.835	.002	.973	52	.000	.325	1.571	-2.825	3.476
	Equal variances not assumed			.975	50.838	.000	.325	1.576	-2.838	3.489

The table reports a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000, below the 0.05 threshold, so H_0 is rejected in favor of H_a . This confirms a statistically significant gap in vocabulary achievement between the riddle-game group and the conventionally taught group. Even so, while the riddle game yielded a significantly higher score, the actual size of that difference between the two groups on the post-test was modest.

4. N-Gain Test

An N-Gain analysis in SPSS was used to gauge each group's relative improvement once the maximum attainable score was taken into account; the results appear below.

Table 7. N-Gain (%) Descriptive Statistics

	Kelas		Statistic	Std. Error
N_Gain Persen	Kelas Eksperimen	Mean	65.81	1.752
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	62.21
			Upper Bound	69.40
		5% Trimmed Mean	65.55	
		Median	66.67	
		Variance	85.980	
		Std. Deviation	9.273	
		Minimum	50	
		Maximum	86	
		Range	36	
		Interquartile Range	15	
		Skewness	.333	.441
		Kurtosis	-.522	.858
	Kelas Kontrol	Mean	64.16	1.462
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	61.15
			Upper Bound	67.17
		5% Trimmed Mean	63.63	
		Median	65.15	
		Variance	55.541	
		Std. Deviation	7.453	
		Minimum	55	

		Maximum	86	
		Range	31	
		Interquartile Range	9	
		Skewness	.846	.456
		Kurtosis	1.218	.887

The experimental group's mean N-Gain reached 65.81%, compared with 64.16% for the control group. Following Albadarin et al. (2024)'s classification, both figures sit in the medium category (56–75%). Although the two groups share the same category, the experimental group edges ahead slightly, suggesting that the riddle game produced a marginally larger relative gain in vocabulary achievement than the conventional approach—consistent with the significant difference already detected in the independent-samples t-test.

Taken together, these results point to a real effect of the riddle game on the vocabulary achievement of Class VIII students at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan. The experimental group's gains outpaced those of the control group, supporting the conclusion that the riddle game outperforms conventional teaching in building English vocabulary—though the size of that advantage remained modest rather than substantial.

Discussion

The riddle-game treatment in the experimental class was intended to boost both participation and vocabulary achievement. The data show a clear jump from pre-test to post-test scores in this group, backed by a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) on the independent-samples t-test comparing post-test results between the two classes. This suggests the riddle game succeeded in drawing students into meaningful vocabulary practice, echoing the broader game-based learning literature, which holds that interactive, game-driven tasks push learners toward deeper cognitive engagement with the target language (Febriani et al., 2025).

Beyond raising scores, the riddle game also helped make the experimental class more lively and enjoyable. Blending guessing-game mechanics with question-and-answer exchanges and descriptive challenges, the activity sparked students' curiosity and encouraged a sense of shared responsibility as groups worked together to crack each clue (Susanti et al., 2026). This mirrors earlier findings that the riddle game meaningfully lifts students' vocabulary scores and exerts a genuine effect on eighth graders' vocabulary mastery, reinforcing that the approach can counter the low achievement typically produced by monotonous, teacher-centered instruction.

This aligns with Rahmawati et al. (2022), who tested the riddle game on 60 eighth graders at SMP AI Washliyah 08 Medan using experimental and control groups formed through cluster random sampling; their t-count of 3.05, higher than the t-table value of 2.00, showed a significant effect on vocabulary mastery. The present study departs from theirs by working within an Islamic junior high school and by following a quasi-experimental design with a clearly specified treatment procedure. Silviani et al. (2024), meanwhile, ran a quasi-experiment with 67 eighth graders at SMPN 1 Cihara, Lebak Banten, comparing a riddle-game class against a crossword-puzzle class via cluster random sampling; their significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) showed the riddle game edging out the crossword puzzle. Here, the comparison is instead between the riddle game and conventional teaching, again set within an Islamic junior high school.

Lorenza (2024) applied a pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design with ninth graders at SMPN 1 Bengkulu and likewise recorded a significant vocabulary gain after riddle-game treatment. This study differs by targeting eighth graders and using a structured, group-based riddle procedure built around explicit vocabulary indicators.

Susanti et al. (2026), working with a one-group pre-test/post-test design among eighth graders, also reported a significant rise in vocabulary scores after introducing the riddle game (Wilda et al., 2024). Unlike that design, the current research took place at an Islamic junior high school (MTs) and included a control class taught conventionally. Across these studies, the positive impact of riddle games on vocabulary mastery is consistent, yet this study stands apart through its Islamic-school setting, its inclusion of a conventionally taught control group, and its structured, group-based treatment procedure.

The effectiveness of this technique can also be gauged by how consistently engaged students stayed and how much interest they showed in vocabulary learning—an area many students previously found tedious. Sustained engagement is itself a marker of heightened learning interest, a pattern also noted by Saputra et al. (2025) in digital game-based vocabulary instruction. A game-based method like the riddle game fits well with contextual, differentiated teaching principles, since teachers can adjust the difficulty of the clues to match each student's ability (Nurammida et al., 2024).

The riddle game also brought an interactive, challenging quality to the classroom atmosphere. By weaving in descriptive challenges and reflective questions, it eased the monotony often linked to traditional methods and pushed students toward more critical thinking. This is consistent with Peeva et al. (2021), who found that the riddle game strengthens both vocabulary mastery and learners' confidence in using the target language. Classroom observation further suggested that the game-based format lowered students' learning anxiety, since it avoided the pressure typically associated with conventional tests—a psychological benefit that matters greatly for junior high students navigating a critical stage of cognitive and socio-emotional growth (Faqih et al., 2025).

As a student-centered approach, the riddle game has learners actively interpret clues tied directly to the vocabulary under study (Assapari et al., 2025), making it a practical tool for supporting vocabulary acquisition. Its implementation in this study clearly improved both the learning process and students' vocabulary outcomes, echoing earlier findings on the technique's value. Given this, teachers are encouraged to keep refining their command of game-based vocabulary strategies and their skill in applying them in class (Hasanah et al., 2026). Ultimately, making the riddle game work well calls for careful lesson planning and cooperation among students, teachers, and the school as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The data analysis and discussion above support the conclusion that the riddle game effectively improves the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at MTs Masalikil Huda Tahunan. The experimental group's mean vocabulary score climbed from 57.00 (pre-test) to 85.00 (post-test), while the control group rose from 55.00 (pre-test) to 83.00 (post-test). The independent-samples t-test also revealed a significant difference between the two groups (Sig 2-tailed = 0.000 < 0.05), that vocabulary mastery differs significantly between students taught with the riddle game and those taught conventionally.

The riddle game regularly as a varied vocabulary-mastery strategy, particularly to train students in picking out vocabulary from contextual clues. The technique's value also shows up in the greater consistency of student engagement and interest it generates engagement that it self signals stronger learning motivation, a pattern likewise seen in digital game-based vocabulary instruction. The riddle game supports contextual and differentiated instruction, letting teachers scale clue difficulty to each student's ability.

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