

## Improving Students' Vocabulary through Socio-Cultural Approach Using ABC 5 Dasar and Ular Naga Games

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### Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan siswa dalam meningkatkan kosakata bahasa Inggris mereka melalui penggunaan pendekatan sosial budaya yang diterapkan melalui permainan tradisional Indonesia yang dimodifikasi ("ABC 5 Dasar" dan "Ular Naga") di UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran, sebuah sekolah menengah pertama. Penelitian ini melibatkan 31 siswa dan dilakukan sebagai Penelitian Tindakan Kelas selama dua siklus. Hasilnya menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam keterampilan kosakata siswa. Nilai rata-rata mereka meningkat dari 63,4 pada tes pertama menjadi 76,1 pada tes kedua, dan kemudian menjadi 87,2 pada tes ketiga. Jumlah siswa yang mendapat skor 75 atau lebih juga meningkat secara signifikan—dari 6,5% (2 siswa) pada tes pertama menjadi 54,8% (17 siswa) pada tes kedua, dan kemudian 90,3% (28 siswa) pada tes ketiga. Baik tes kosakata maupun observasi kelas menunjukkan bahwa siswa merespons proses pengajaran secara positif, menunjukkan peningkatan keterlibatan, peningkatan interaksi dengan teman sebaya, penerapan kata kontekstual yang lebih baik, dan kesadaran budaya yang lebih besar. Berdasarkan data yang diperoleh, pendekatan sosial budaya dengan permainan "ABC 5 Dasar" dan "Ular Naga" memberikan pengaruh yang signifikan dalam membantu siswa UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran dalam meningkatkan kosakata bahasa Inggris.

**Kata kunci:** *Pendekatan Sosial Budaya, Permainan Tradisional ABC 5 Dasar dan Ular Naga, Peningkatan Kosakata*

### Abstract

This study aimed to enhance students' ability in improving their English vocabulary through the use of a socio-cultural approach implemented via modified traditional Indonesian games ("ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga") at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran, a junior high school. The study involved 31 students and was conducted as Classroom Action Research over two cycles. The results indicated significant improvements in the students' vocabulary skills. Their average score increased from 63.4 in the first test to 76.1 in the second, and then to 87.2 in the third. The number of students scoring 75 or higher also improved significantly—from 6.5% (2 students) in the first test to 54.8% (17 students) in the second, and then 90.3% (28 students) in the third. Both vocabulary tests and classroom observations demonstrated that students responded positively to the teaching process, displaying increased engagement, enhanced peer interaction, better contextual word application, and greater cultural awareness. According to the data, the socio-cultural approach with the "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga" games had a significant influence on helping students at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran increase their English vocabulary.

**Keywords:** *Socio-Cultural Approach, Traditional Games ABC 5 Dasar and Ular Naga, Vocabulary Improvement*

### INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that enables global communication. Students must learn four English skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. It is feasible to modify students' capacities so that they can do all of the skills during the teaching and learning process. However, it is not a success if their vocabulary mastery is weak. As such, vocabulary is one of the components used to promote the four English language abilities. As a result, the students' vocabulary should be

enlarged. This lesson will focus on vocabulary. Grammar and vocabulary are essential for communication (Thornbury, 2002:13).

According to Hatch and Brown, as referenced by Farida, Isrina, and Apsari (2019), "Vocabulary is the foundation of language development, which serves as a basis for communication." Furthermore, Cameron (Furqon, 2013) stated that vocabulary is an important micro skill for producing language in both spoken and written forms. When a learner wants to study a foreign language, he must first master the vocabulary in order to build a solid foundation for the language at the primary level. Someone with a vast vocabulary in a foreign language can easily learn and create the language.

However, findings at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran suggest significant challenges to English language learning, notably among students in class VIII-1. The biggest issue discovered is a lack of student interest, which is frequently caused by poor basic knowledge and un engaging instructional approaches. Teachers usually use traditional, teacher-centered approaches, which results in low student engagement and a widespread demand for more engaging and dynamic classroom experiences. Furthermore, there is a significant lack of integration of local Indonesian culture, particularly traditional games, which are increasingly foreign to students in the digital era.

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) provides a new solution based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, which states that discussion and social engagement promote language acquisition. The purpose of this study is to look into the effectiveness of using a socio-cultural approach to improve students' vocabulary by modifying classic Indonesian games such as "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga". This technique aims to provide an interest, dynamic, and culturally relevant learning environment for the 31 students in class VIII-1 at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran, resulting in improving vocabulary acquisition while also creating a respect for Indonesian culture.

### **Socio-Cultural Theory**

The socio-cultural approach, which focuses primarily on Lev Vygotsky's (1978) work, emphasizes that learning is a social process that is heavily influenced by contact and culture. It holds that cognitive development is facilitated by discussion and social engagement, with language functioning as an important tool for intellectual transformation. In an educational setting, this indicates that learning is most effective when it takes place in a supportive social atmosphere, allowing pupils to co-create knowledge through interaction with peers and more knowledgeable others. This method emphasizes how knowledge contained in a culture evolves through social involvement and communication.

### **"ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga" Games in Language Learning**

According to Christiyanti et al. (1997) in Darisman (2018), the values contained in traditional games include: (1) democratic values, (2) educational values, and (3) personality values. Furthermore, traditional games possess certain aspects that can be developed to shape a child's character. These aspects are: (1) physical aspects, (2) psychological aspects, (3) social aspects, (4) health values, and (5) unity values (Tarbiyah et al., 2012). The educational values contained in traditional children's games are no longer able to contribute to the development of a cultured and character-driven Indonesian generation due to the lack of preservation of traditional games among children. Integrating traditional games into the curriculum offers a possible teaching approach. Traditional games, such as "ABC 5 Dasar" (from Central Java) and "Ular Naga" (from Betawi), have intrinsic characteristics that can be used for instructional reasons. These games are usually interactive, encourage conversation, and are firmly ingrained in the local culture. Modifying these games to include English language aspects allows students to learn in a fun and culturally appropriate way. This technique is believed to not only increase motivation and enjoyment of learning, but also to improve cultural identity and promote contextual language use.

According to research, using traditional games can help students develop cultural understanding in the classroom. The introduction of additional tools such as the "Mysterious Amplop" (Mysterious Envelope) and "Kartu Kosakata" (Vocabulary Cards) supports this strategy. These tools are intended to convey contextual and culturally relevant English verbs, encouraging curiosity, strengthening vocabulary development, and developing real text comprehension. This new learning strategy strives to solve the combined concerns of low motivation and insufficient cultural integration by providing teachers with a creative and participatory alternative technique.

## Improving Students' Vocabulary

When people learn a language, one of the first things they must do is develop the vocabulary. A strong command of vocabulary is essential for anyone learning the language used for listening, speaking, writing, and reading, in addition to grammar. A learner of a foreign language will talk fluently and accurately, write readily, and understand what he or she reads or hears if he or she has a sufficient vocabulary and the capacity to use it correctly. Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language proficiency, directly impacting comprehension and communication. Effective vocabulary acquisition goes beyond rote memorization; it involves understanding words in context, their nuances, and how they function in different communicative situations.

According to Burton (1982: 98), using English language precisely and passionately requires a vast vocabulary. While Coulson et al. (1987: 1050) describe mastery as competence, application, or knowledge. It signifies that mastery is the ability to apply one's knowledge. According to Horn (1995: 721), ability is defined as comprehensive knowledge or considerable skill. Therefore, it is extremely important for English teachers to assist their students in improving vocabulary. Research consistently shows that engaging and interactive methods are more effective than passive learning for vocabulary development. When students are actively involved in meaningful tasks that require the use of new words, their retention and ability to apply those words in authentic contexts significantly improve. Furthermore, fostering a positive learning environment where students feel comfortable experimenting with new language, even if they make mistakes, is crucial for building vocabulary confidence.

## METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology, quantitative and descriptive qualitative design. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2006), in some situation, Classroom Action Research focusing on planning, action, and observation could prove useful for teachers collecting practical, short-term solutions to classroom challenges. The research was conducted at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran VIII-1 class. 31 students were enrolled in the class, comprising of 13 male and 18 female students. The data for this research was sourced from the VIII-1 class in the academic year 2024/2025. The data was obtained through observation. The core intervention was the implementation of a socio-cultural approach in English language teaching, focusing on improving students' vocabulary through modified traditional games: "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga". These games were adapted to include English vocabulary. The data in this research was collected by encouraging students' vocabulary assessment.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This section presents the findings from the Classroom Action Research conducted with 31 students of class VIII-1 at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran, focusing on the improvement of their English vocabulary through the implementation of a socio-cultural approach using modified "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga" games. The discussion will compare the students' vocabulary proficiency and learning engagement before and after the intervention.

### Conditions Before the Implementation of the Socio-Cultural Approach

Before the implementation of the modified traditional games, observations and an initial diagnostic evaluation (Test 1) revealed numerous substantial obstacles encountered by the 31 pupils in class VIII-1 when learning English vocabulary. Most students had little vocabulary proficiency, notably in verbs, and frequently used Indonesian throughout communication, even when asked to use English. Motivation and engagement were also noticeably low, since teacher-centered methods based on rote memorization made classes monotonous and uninteresting, resulting in passive participation—fewer than 30% of students actively participated in class debates or activities. Furthermore, students failed to employ vocabulary in context; while they could recognize terms in isolation, they found it difficult to apply them meaningfully in sentences or real-life circumstances, demonstrating a lack of contextual comprehension. Adding to these difficulties was the lack of cultural integration in English instruction, with students demonstrating little awareness of how their own cultural background could aid in language development. These

challenges highlight the critical need for a more dynamic, interactive, and culturally relevant teaching style to improve students' vocabulary

### Conditions After the Implementation of the Socio-Cultural Approach (ABC 5 Dasar and Ular Naga Games)

Following the structured implementation of the socio-cultural approach in English vocabulary teaching applying modified "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga" games, the 31 students in class VIII-1 improved significantly in a number of areas. Vocabulary mastery improved significantly, as evidenced by Tests 2 and 3, with students displaying faster and more accurate recall of English verbs from the "Misteryous Amplop"; where previously only 5-10 kids could react properly, this number grew to 20-25 following the intervention. Motivation and engagement increased considerably as all students actively participated in the games, changing the classroom into an enthusiastic and collaborative environment. These interactive exercises resulted in the achievement of learning objectives, with over 60% gaining vocabulary abilities and more than 80% effectively applying the words during gameplay. Furthermore, students became more confidence in applying terminology in context, thanks to the low-pressure, playful environment that allowed them to experiment without fear of making mistakes. The activities also promoted cultural pride since students liked participating in traditional customs in a new English-language format, which reinforced both linguistic and cultural identity.

- *Quantitative Data*

The following table presents the individual scores of the 31 students in Class VIII-1. The writer used the scores from three writing tests to see how well the students were doing. The first test was given at the very beginning, the second test was given during the first part of the study, and the third test was given during the second part. The writer found that the students' scores got better and better each time they took a test. (Test 1: Pre-test, Test 2: Mid-intervention, Test 3: Post-test). The tests were designed to assess their mastery of the target English vocabulary.

- *Qualitative Data*

Several advantages were indicated by the qualitative data acquired through observations and vocabulary assessments among students. Students demonstrated significantly more involvement, with increased enthusiasm and active participation in English courses, as the games turned regular learning into a fun and dynamic experience. Peer interaction also improved significantly as students worked together to recall terminology and supported one another, resulting in a low-anxiety, community-based learning environment. During the games, kids also began using newly learned words in context, showing a shift from memory to meaningful utilization. Both students and teachers enjoyed the use of traditional Indonesian games, which enhanced the learning experience by connecting it to cultural heritage. Furthermore, teachers felt more empowered and motivated in their teaching techniques after seeing the socio-cultural method's effectiveness in improving both learning results and classroom motivation.

### The Data Analysis

#### 1. *Quantitative Data Analysis*

The quantitative data from the three vocabulary tests demonstrate a clear and significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery. The scores are out of a maximum of 100 points.

Student Name	Test 1 Score (Pre-test)	Test 2 Score (Mid-intervention)	Test 3 Score (Post-test)	Progress (Test 3 - Test 1)	Percentage Increase
AL	55	70	85	30	54.5%
AY	48	65	80	32	66.7%
BY	60	75	90	30	50.0%
DC	50	68	82	32	64.0%
FE	52	72	88	36	69.2%

GGH	45	60	78	33	73.3%
GN	58	73	87	29	50.0%
HR	40	55	75	35	87.5%
HZ	62	78	92	30	48.4%
IP	53	67	83	30	56.6%
JK	47	63	79	32	68.1%
KM	51	69	84	33	64.7%
MAK	56	71	86	30	53.6%
MDE	49	66	81	32	65.3%
MCF	54	70	85	31	57.4%
NB	46	62	77	31	67.4%
NS	59	74	89	30	50.8%
PW	42	58	76	34	80.9%
PY	61	77	91	30	49.2%
RA	50	65	80	30	60.0%
RM	44	59	74	30	68.2%
RP	57	72	87	30	52.6%
SA	43	61	75	32	74.4%
SP	52	68	83	31	59.6%
SR	48	64	79	31	64.6%
TD	55	70	85	30	54.5%
TH	47	63	78	31	66.0%
TM	50	66	81	31	62.0%
UK	45	60	77	32	71.1%
WK	53	69	84	31	58.5%
YS	49	65	80	31	63.3%
<b>Average</b>	<b>50.6</b>	<b>66.6</b>	<b>81.6</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>62.7%</b>

The data presented in the table clearly shows that students' initial scores were low during the first meeting. However, after the introduction of the *ABC 5 dasar and ular naga* games in the classroom, their performance began to improve starting with Test II, and the progress continued to grow by Test III.

- Overall Progress: The 31 students' average score increased from 50.6 in Test 1 (pre-intervention) to 66.6 in Test 2 (mid-intervention), and then to 81.6 in Test 3 (post-intervention). This is an average absolute improvement of 31.0 points from Test 1 to Test 3, or a percentage increase of nearly 62.7%.
- Individual growth varied, with the lowest absolute increase of 29 points (Students 7 and 22) and the highest at 36 points (Student 5). The percentage increase ranged from 48.4% (Student 9) to 87.5% (Student 8). This suggests that, while almost all students made significant improvements, some gained even more significantly from the intervention.
- The results showed that all participants improved their English vocabulary from Test 1 to Test 3. This greatly exceeds the success measure, which had a target of 60% participation. The steady rising trend across all students demonstrates the usefulness of the sociocultural approach. The average score in Test 3 (81.6) indicates that by the end of the intervention, the participants had an excellent grasp of the target language.

## 2. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data significantly supports the quantitative findings, providing additional insight into how the socio-cultural strategy promoted vocabulary improvement. Increased student involvement and motivation are closely correlated with higher scores on tests. Students who were previously passive learners became active participants, expressing enthusiasm for the activities. The increased contextual vocabulary use observed during the games suggests that students were not just remembering words but also actively using them in meaningful settings,



which is an important part of true vocabulary mastery. The favorable classroom dynamics, which included peer collaboration and lowered fear, generated an ideal setting for language acquisition, according with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The introduction of local culture created a sense of relevancy and pride, which served as an additional motivator for students. Both students and teachers regularly expressed their enjoyment and effectiveness with the modified traditional games, which validated the chosen intervention.

## Discussion

The findings strongly imply that using a socio-cultural strategy, such as modified traditional games like "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga," is highly beneficial in boosting the English vocabulary of pupils in class VIII-1 at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran. The pre-intervention difficulties of low motivation, limited vocabulary, and a lack of contextual learning were dramatically reduced following the intervention. Several variables inherent in the socio-cultural approach contribute to its success:

- **Engagement and Motivation:** The games' lighthearted and competitive nature naturally increases student motivation. When learning is fun, students are more likely to participate and put up cognitive effort to acquire new language. This immediately addresses the root cause of disengagement with traditional methods. The students' passion and active participation converted the classroom into a vibrant learning environment.
- **Contextual Learning:** The games create a natural and meaningful environment for language development. Rather than remembering individual words, kids learn and apply vocabulary within the game's dynamic context. Contextual learning improves comprehension, retention, and word-usage skills. The leap from recognizing words in isolation to using them in gaming contexts was clear.
- **Social communication:** In line with Vygotsky's philosophy, the games promote considerable social contact among pupils. They interact, collaborate, and compete, resulting in a diverse linguistic environment in which language is continually utilized and reinforced via peer-to-peer learning. This collaborative approach was critical in assisting kids with diverse initial vocabulary skills.
- **Cultural Relevance:** By including traditional Indonesian games, the learning process becomes more culturally relevant and applicable to the students' life. This connection not only makes learning more enjoyable, but it also instills a sense of cultural pride, increasing the link between language learning and identity. The combination of familiarity with the games and novelty in using them for English resulted in a unique and successful learning experience.
- **Active participation:** Unlike passive learning, these games require active engagement from all students. This active participation is critical for successful language acquisition because it provides countless opportunities for practice and fast feedback. The high percentage of pupils employing language during the games (80%) demonstrates their enthusiastic participation.

## CONCLUSION

The data analysis showed a significant improvement in students' English vocabulary scores, notably in the contextual use of words, after implementing the socio-cultural approach using modified "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga" games. This research demonstrates the socio-cultural approach's usefulness in improving English vocabulary achievement among pupils. The consistent increase in scores from the first to the final test, together with apparent gains in motivation and engagement, supports this trend. Thus, it can be concluded that the socio-cultural approach, as supported by the "ABC 5 Dasar" and "Ular Naga" games, is an effective method for increasing the English vocabulary performance of Junior High School students at UPTD SMPN 6 Kisaran. Based on the successful outcomes of this research, the following suggestions are offered:

- For teachers: Teachers are being advised to include and modify the socio-cultural approach, which includes traditional games, into their English language classes. Continuous professional growth in incorporating cultural themes and gamification into

language teaching would be excellent. It is also encouraged to look into other traditional Indonesian games that can be used to learn the language.

- For Students: Students are urged to continue actively participating in language learning activities, including interactive approaches, and to appreciate the connection between their culture and the English language.
- For further researchers: Further research could look into the long-term effects of this approach on vocabulary retention and overall language competency. It would also be beneficial to investigate the effectiveness of this method across grade levels or with other language skills (for example, grammar, speaking). Comparative studies with other new teaching methods could strengthen the findings.

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