



Enhancing vocabulary acquisition through word association recitation among EFL students

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Vocabulary is one of the key components of mastering English. Schools provide an important environment where EFL students can begin learning the language. This study aimed to examine whether word association recitation could enhance vocabulary acquisition among beginner-level EFL students at an Islamic junior high school. A Classroom Action Research (CAR) design was employed to investigate the implementation of the word association recitation technique in improving vocabulary acquisition among seventh-grade students at Nurus Sunnah Islamic Junior High School. This CAR was conducted over two cycles between October and November 2024, with each cycle consisting of three instructional sessions. A purposive sampling method was used to select Class 7A (N= 143), which included students with varied levels of prior English exposure. The findings showed improve classroom engagement: attention increased from 46% to 67%, participation from 47% to 71%, and positive attitudes from 57% to 74%. Notably, post-test scores rose by 46.7%, from an average of 49.23 to 72.23, with substantial gains among lower-proficiency learners (up to 122% improvement). A paired-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-intervention scores ($p = .000$), confirming the positive impact of word association recitation on vocabulary learning. Future research is recommended to explore the integration of communicative tasks, assess the approach across broader EFL contexts, and incorporate digital tools to further enhance vocabulary practice.

Keywords: EFL students, vocabulary acquisition, word association recitation, classroom action research

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN 2503 3492 (online)

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Received: 17th June 2025

Accepted: 6th September 2025

Published: 16th October 2025

Citation:

Putra, A.R., Mulyadi, D., Aimah, S.,
Ginting, P., Singh, C.K.S. (2025).

Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition
through Word Association Recitation
among EFL Students. *JEES (Journal of
English Educators Society)*, 10(2).
<https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v10i2.1950>

INTRODUCTION

One of the crucial aspects of language acquisition is vocabulary development. A strong vocabulary foundation enables students to communicate more effectively, comprehend texts with greater ease, and express their ideas clearly. Mastery of vocabulary also allows learners to engage actively in both academic and social discourse (Marlinton et al., 2023). At the beginner level, students who are exposed to English for the first time are still adapting to the language (Daar, 2020). At this stage, the primary learning goals include understanding simple instructions, everyday expressions, and basic conversations. As learners progress, another important objective is to enhance their reading abilities by recognizing and comprehending frequently used words. This may involve reading short and simple texts such as signs, labels, and basic stories. Through these gradual steps, learners expand their vocabulary, which is vital for overall language development. Effective vocabulary instruction is therefore essential in helping students establish a strong lexical foundation and engage with the target language more proficiently.

To use English in daily communication, students must first master the most frequently used words, known as "lemmas," which serve as the core units of meaning in a language. [Webb \(2016\)](#) suggests that focusing on 800 to 1,000 of the most common lemmas enables learners to quickly develop a functional grasp of the language. However, preliminary screening conducted by the English teacher at the beginning of the school year revealed that the seventh-grade students at Nurus Sunnah Islamic Junior High School lacked knowledge of even the most basic vocabulary (see [Appendix 1](#)). In this test, students were asked to translate 40 random words (nouns and verbs) selected from the 1,000 most commonly used words in English.

Not all teachers are adequately prepared to address such challenges, which often results in frustration and decreased motivation among EFL students ([Irma, 2020](#); [Abdalla & Alameen, 2019](#)). This lack of preparedness may stem from limited training in managing diverse learning needs or handling classroom difficulties specific to language acquisition. To break this cycle, teachers should adopt practical techniques that foster engagement and accommodate individual learner differences.

[Ben-Jacob and Glazerman \(2021\)](#) note that the learning process involves multiple form of interaction, and they found that learning by doing (practice) is far more effective than passive listening. Applied to language learning, this suggests that traditional vocabulary instruction methods, such as translation and memorization, could be enhanced by integrating recitation and word association as strategies for improving vocabulary acquisition. Supporting this idea, [Tryana & Mahmud \(2023\)](#) strengthens found that learning new languages involves associating unfamiliar words with prior knowledge. Similarly, [Rashid et al \(2022\)](#) emphasize the importance of teaching vocabulary in context, highlighting the need for learners to understand not only word meanings but also collocations, multiple uses, and grammatical functions.

The word association and recitation technique involve the deliberately new vocabulary with familiar concepts, images, or personal experiences. This method encourages learners to create meaningful connections between new words and their existing knowledge or lived experiences ([Gunawan, 2020](#)). Furthermore, repeated exposure to vocabulary through systematic practice promote incremental gains in word retention and recall ([Gunawan, 2020](#)). By leveraging the combined benefits of association and recitation, students can strengthen their lexical retention and ultimately enhance overall language proficiency.

Previous studies have employed various methods and media to enhance students' vocabulary, including crossword puzzle, movies application such as Quizlet, the word association method, and progressive word increments. However, none have investigated the combination of word association and recitation within a classroom action research setting. This study therefore examines the effectiveness of using word association recitation techniques to enhance vocabulary acquisition among EFL students at a private junior high school in Semarang, Indonesia. Guided by this objective, the study addresses two research questions: a) How can word association recitation be implemented to enhance

vocabulary acquisition among EFL students? and b) To what extent can word association recitation enhance vocabulary acquisition among EFL students?

METHODS

This study was primarily quantitative in nature, employing a classroom action research design while also incorporating qualitative insights to enrich the findings. The study focused on gathering empirical data to evaluate the extent to which word association and recitation technique enhanced students' ability to recall and use new vocabulary. Quantitative data were obtained from assessments administered at the end of each cycle to measure student learning outcomes. To complement this, qualitative data were gathered through field observations conducted collaboratively by the researcher and the English teacher using an observation sheet. This study received approved from the school principal.

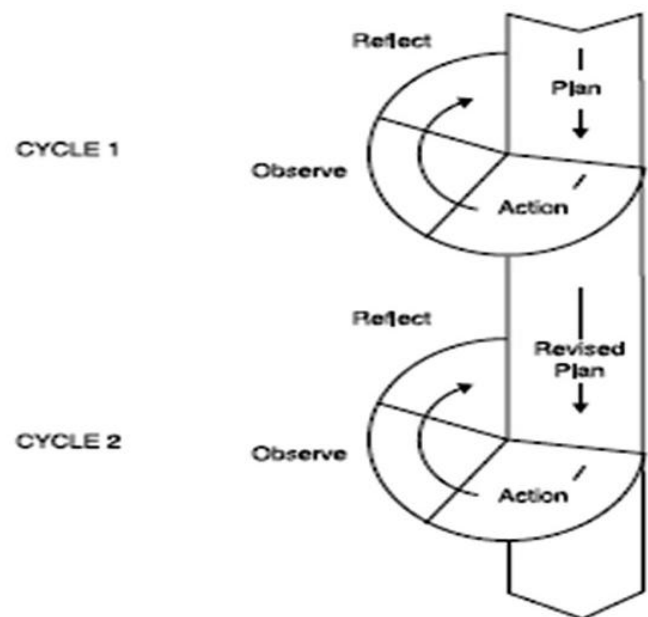


FIGURE 1 | Kemmis & Taggart's Classroom Action Research

This study followed the steps of action research outlined by [Kemmis and Taggart \(1988\)](#). The first step designing a general plan for action. In the action phase, the researcher implemented teaching based on the planned scenario, while another teacher conducted observation to document the effects of the intervention. The reflection phase entailed analyzing and evaluating these effects as the basis for further planning. At this phase, the outcome of the action was described and assessed. The general plan was then revised, and the subsequent action was planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

This research was conducted in English class at a private Islamic junior high school in Semarang. The total student's population of the school was 143, consisting of 44 male and 99 female students. This study employed purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific criteria. Grade seven was chosen because students at this level had just entered junior high school, making it appropriate to compare differences in skills between those with and without prior

formal English education. Class 7A, consisting of 13 students, was chosen because it included both students who had previously received English instruction in elementary school and those who had not.

Research Instruments

A research instrument is a tool or device used to collect, measure, and analyze data in a research study. The instruments used in this classroom action research were as follows:

Observation Sheets

The observation sheet in this study was developed based on indicators of the students' activities during the Word Association Recitation. These indicators included students' attention during learning activities, active participation in classroom tasks, and positive attitudes such as enjoyment or happiness toward the learning process. Further details about the observation sheet are provided in the Appendix.

The updated Vocabulary Levels Test

This study examined students' mastery of the 1,000 most frequently used words in English. To measure the vocabulary knowledge, it employed "The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test" developed by [Webb et al. \(2017\)](#). This test specifically measures receptive vocabulary knowledge, the ability to recognize the connection between a word's form and its meaning when reading. It does not measure productive vocabulary knowledge (the ability to produce a word) or other dimensions such as collocation or polysemy. To minimize score inflation from repeated testing, two equivalent forms (Form A and Form B) were used. The test evaluates vocabulary knowledge across five levels; however, this study focused on the section designed to measure mastery of the 1,000 most frequently used words.

Scores and Assessments

Scores and assessments were obtained at the end of each cycle to assess student learning outcomes. Students' scores were converted into percentages of the maximum possible score. To analyze the data, the researcher calculated the average vocabulary scores across cycles, providing an overall measure of students' vocabulary development.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically applying statistical and logical techniques to describe, summarize, and compare data. It involves interpreting the data collected during research to draw conclusions and address research questions or test hypotheses. In the context of classroom action research, the stages of sorting, describing, and inferring were used to interpret the interventions to guide subsequent classroom actions.

Data sorting was carried out using applications such as Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 26. Vocabulary test results were inserted into Excel to identify patterns, while daily activity data were processed in SPSS to conduct a paired-samples t-tests.

Descriptive analysis involved organizing and presenting results from each instrument. Vocabulary test results were presented in tables showing pre-test and post-test scores. Observation sheet data were presented in graphs, and daily assessment results were presented in tables.

Inferential analysis was conducted by comparing the results of the vocabulary tests with observations from cycles 1 and 2. Additionally, daily assessments collected throughout the CAR were analyzed against predetermined success indicators. Success indicators functioned as benchmarks for determining the effectiveness of the intervention. According to [Zain and Djamarah \(2006\)](#), the success of a learning process is achieved when at least 75% of students reach a minimum, optimal, or maximum level of success, allowing the learning process to progress to subsequent subjects. Based on this criterion, the success indicators for this present classroom action research were defined as follows:

Success Indicators for Students' Vocabulary Mastery: The CAR was considered successful if at least 80% of students demonstrate an adequate level of vocabulary mastery. Success was defined as students achieving a minimum score of 80% on the vocabulary mastery assessments, as measured against the established indicators.

Learning Outcome Success Indicator: The CAR was considered successful if at least 80% of students meet the minimum completeness criteria for learning outcomes at the end of each cycle. In this context, success means that the majority of students achieve the required level of understanding and performance as specified in the predetermined learning objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers conducted the action research over three cycles, each consisting of the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Each cycle comprised two lessons. The Grade 7A English class was scheduled every Tuesday during the semester. The first meeting, held on October 29, 2024, served as the introduction and administration of the pre-test. The following are details of each cycle.

Cycle 1

The learning material for Cycle 1 was the Chapter 2 "Daily Conversation." This cycle consisted of three lessons. The stages were as follows:

Lesson 1

Planning

The action plans for Cycle I included: (1) Preparing learning tools such as lesson plans and handouts; (2) Developing a minimum completeness criteria sheet and evaluation test questions; (3) Preparing observation sheets for monitoring student activities; (4) Preparing documentation tools.

Acting

During the lesson on October 5th, students engaged in various structured activities designed to improve their comprehension and application of to be in context. The main activities included listening to a recording of a conversation between two friends attending a concert, reading the corresponding dialogue, and determining whether given statements about the dialogue were true or false (Activity 2). Following this, the teacher explained the concept and usage of to be (is, am, are) with relevant examples. Students then worked in pairs to discuss related or similar words found in the dialogue. The

session concluded with Activities 3 and 4, which completed either individually or collaboratively in pairs.

Observing

During this lesson, students were unfocused and unable to answer questions when asked.

Reflecting

Based on the observation and activity results, the researcher concluded that the students' vocabulary mastery was still not satisfactory, as reflected in their lack of response. The teacher decided to familiarize the students with classroom instructions in English to increase their engagement and comprehension.

Lesson 2

Planning

Building on the findings from the first lesson, the second one was designed to include more oral practices, such as reading new words aloud before engaging with them in written form.

Acting

The second meeting, held on November 12, 2024, focused on the theme of nationalities and the vocabulary associated with them. This session aimed to expand students' understanding of countries and the corresponding terms used to describe their citizens. The main activities included: 1) listening to a recording that introduced the pronunciation of various country names in English (5 minutes). 2) Participating in an oral repetition exercise to practice pronunciation (5 minutes). 3) Reading a short text about Cappadocia from the textbook (p. 27) to contextualize the vocabulary (10 minutes). 4) Studying a list of country names alongside their corresponding nationalities (p. 29) to further build vocabulary (15 minutes).

Observing

During this lesson, students reacted slowly to new tasks. Those who did not understand the instructions tended to ask their peers for clarification before engaging in the activity.

Reflecting

Based on the observation and activity results, the researcher concluded that the students' vocabulary showed improvement, although it was still not fully satisfactory.

Lesson 3

Planning

This lesson took place immediately after the previous one, with only a lunch break in between. According to the schedule, this class had two consecutive lessons once every week. This arrangement limited opportunities for advance reparation, so the teacher still continued using the previous strategy of familiarizing students with classroom instructions in English.

Acting

The third meeting, held on November 12th, 2024, focused on nationalities and related vocabulary, with a specific focus on forming and using WH-questions in context. The main activities included: 1) explaining WH-question words, who, what, where, and how, and their correct usage in sentences (15 minutes). 2) Completing Activity 9, which required students to apply WH-questions appropriately (15 minutes). 3) Working on Activities 10 and 11, where students completed dialogues by inserting the correct WH-questions

based on visual prompts (25 minutes). 4) Engaging in a closing reflection, reporting on the progress of their mini projects, and receiving information about the upcoming session (10 minutes).

Observing

During this lesson, students were mostly focused and had begun answering questions that they understood.

Reflecting

Based on the observation and activity results, the researcher concluded that students' vocabulary mastery was still below expectations. This was evident from the number of students who scored below the minimum mastery criterion. The researcher decided to provide more extensive vocabulary practice along with additional pronunciation exercises in the following lessons.

The data in [Table 1, appendix 1](#) presents the scores for 13 students across three lessons (Lesson 1, Lesson 2, and Lesson 3) in Cycle 1. Overall, Lesson 2 showed the highest performance, with a mean score of 78.77 and a median of 80, while Lesson 3 recorded the lowest mean (74.46) and median (74), indicating it was the most challenging session. Student A consistently obtained lower scores, with an overall mean of 71.33, whereas, student AFA performed strongly across all lessons, achieving the highest mean score (83.00).

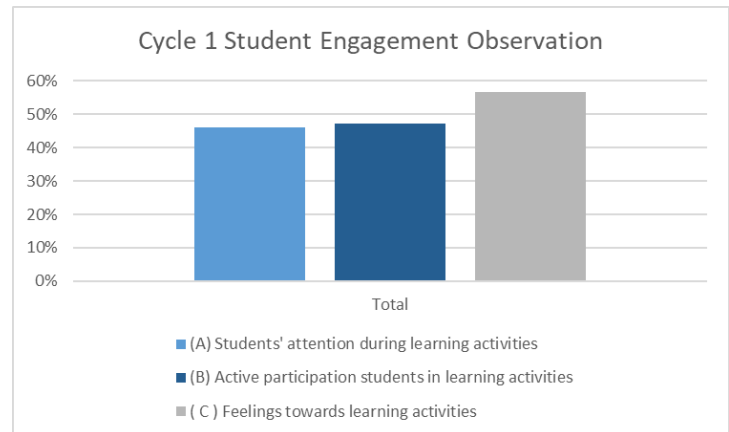


FIGURE 1 | Cycle 1 Student Engagement Observation

[Figure 1](#) describes the student engagement as observed in the first cycle. Students demonstrated the highest engagement in terms of positive attitudes and emotional investment (57%). However, their focus during lessons (46%) and active involvement in tasks (47%) were slightly lower, suggesting a need for improvement in sustaining concentration and participatory behaviors. Overall, the results indicate a moderate level of engagement, with emotional factors (C) surpassing both cognitive and behavioral aspects (A and B).

Cycle 2

The learning material for Cycle II was a continuation of Cycle I, with a specific focus on "Nationality." The cycle aimed to refine and enhance the effectiveness of the teaching strategies based on feedback and data collected from the previous cycle.

Lesson 1

Planning

The action plans for Cycle II included: (1) preparing learning tools such as lesson plans and handouts; (2) developing a

minimum completeness criteria sheet and evaluation test questions; (3) preparing implementation of word association games to all students; and (5) preparing documentation tools.

Acting

The second cycle was conducted on November 19th, 2024. The session began with a review activity where students were asked reflective questions from the previous meeting, such as: "How do you use 'what, who, where, and how' in sentences?" This served as a warm-up to activate prior knowledge. During the main activities (55 minutes), the teacher introduced a Word Association Game designed to strengthen vocabulary retention and reinforce the contextual use of the verb to be. Students were first encouraged to pair up and discuss similar or related words they had encountered in earlier prior lessons (5 minutes). Following this, they were divided into small groups of 2 - 4 members and tasked with creating a short dialogue that included self-introduction and the use of WH-questions to gather information (25 minutes). Each group then performed their dialogues in front of the class, giving them the opportunity to apply their learning in a communicative and interactive manner (25 minutes).

Observing

Students demonstrated greater confidence because they had the chance to discuss with their partners before expressing their own opinions. The word association game also created a livelier classroom atmosphere, as evidenced by the active participation of all students in the activity.

Reflecting

The researcher noted a modest improvement in students' engagement during the lesson. It was decided to incorporate word association recitation in the following lesson to further enhance vocabulary retention.

Lesson 2

Planning

This lesson was designed to maximize vocabulary acquisition by (1) introducing including new vocabulary through a video (2) engaging students in group tasks to encourage discussions of the new vocabulary; and (3) reinforcing memorization through word association recitation.

Acting

The second meeting, held on November 23rd, 2024, focused on teaching students about nationalities and related vocabulary. This session aimed to enhance students' cultural awareness and descriptive abilities through engaging and interactive activities. During the core session (55 minutes), students were first asked to form groups of three (5 minutes) and re-watch their selected video featuring a famous place (15 minutes). After viewing, they noted key information, including the location, the reason the place is famous, and their personal reasons for liking it (15 minutes). To consolidate vocabulary and memory skills, the teacher then introduced a Word Association Recitation activity (20 minutes). In this task, the teacher wrote a base word on the board (e.g., sun), and students took turns suggesting associated words (e.g., round, circle, wheel, car, etc.) until approximately eight words were listed. Each student silently chose one word to memorize. The teacher then confirmed word selections by asking for a show of hands and ensured that any unchosen words were memorized by the entire class.

All words were then erased and replaced with circles. As the teacher pointed to each circle, students recalled and pronounced their chosen word aloud. For unselected words, the whole class either clapped in unison or recited the word together. The process was repeated forwards and backwards at varying speeds, concluding with a full-class recitation of all the words. This activity not only strengthened vocabulary development but also fostered engagement, memory retention, and collaborative learning.

Observing

Students demonstrated improved focus and stronger engagement in group discussions and task completion. While a few students still showed occasional restlessness, the overall learning atmosphere was noticeably more productive.

Reflecting

The researcher observed clear progress in the students' vocabulary and pronunciation skills.

Lesson 3

Planning

This lesson was conducted immediately after the previous one, following a lunch break. According to the schedule, this class had two consecutive sessions once every two weeks. This limited the planning process; therefore, the teacher continued the previous strategy of strengthening student's vocabulary acquisition, followed by a daily assessment.

Acting

The third meeting, held on November 23rd, 2024, began with students asking questions about any material from previous sessions that they had not yet fully understood. As a warm-up activity, the class engaged in a Word Association Recitation (15 minutes) to stimulate memory and language fluency. In this activity, the teacher wrote a word on the board, and students collaboratively generated associated words. The sequence was repeated forwards and backwards at varying speeds to strengthen retention, concluding with the class reciting all the words in unison. Following this activity, students completed the final assignment for the chapter (Textbook pp. 34–36) as part of the chapter evaluation. This task served as a summative assessment to measure their understanding of the material covered throughout the unit. Afterwards, students reflected on the second chapter by responding to several guiding questions posed by the teacher. The session concluded with a post-test on new vocabulary.

Observing

Students demonstrated better focus and stronger engagement in group discussions and task completion. They were notably more active in asking and answering questions. Although a few students still showed occasional restlessness, the overall classroom atmosphere was markedly more productive.

Reflecting

The researcher observed a modest improvement in students' vocabulary mastery, as reflected in the increased number of students who scored above the minimum passing grade (KKM). Additionally, noticeable progress was also evident in their pronunciation skills.

The data in [Table 2 Appendix 1](#) presents the performance of 13 students across three lessons (Lesson 1, Lesson 2, and Lesson 3) during Cycle 2. Overall, Lesson 1 recorded the

highest mean score (84.23), with a median of 90 and a mode of 90 (appearing 8 times), indicating strong and consistent performance. Lesson 3 followed closely, with a mean of 87.23, a median of 88, and two mode - 84 and 90 (each appearing 4 times). Lesson 2 showed a slightly lower mean (82.38), a median of 80, and a mode of 80 (5 occurrences), suggesting it was the most challenging of the three lessons. At the individual level, Student FAJ stood out with the highest score in Lesson 2 (96) and a strong overall mean (91.33). Student MZA achieved the single highest score (100 in Lesson 3), contributing to their high overall mean (90.00). In contrast, Student A obtained the lowest mean (76.67), with consistent but modest performance scores across all lessons.

Cycle 2 demonstrated a general improvement compared to Cycle 1. The mean scores rose significantly across all lessons, with Lesson 1 rising from 76.46 to 84.23 and Lesson 3 from 74.46 to 87.23. The mode in Lesson 1 also shifted markedly, from 74 in Cycle 1 to 90 in Cycle 2, achieved by 8 out of the 13 students, indicating that the use of word association recitation contributed to higher achievement. Even the lowest scores improved, with no student scoring below 75 in Cycle 2, compared to a minimum score of 66 in Cycle 1.

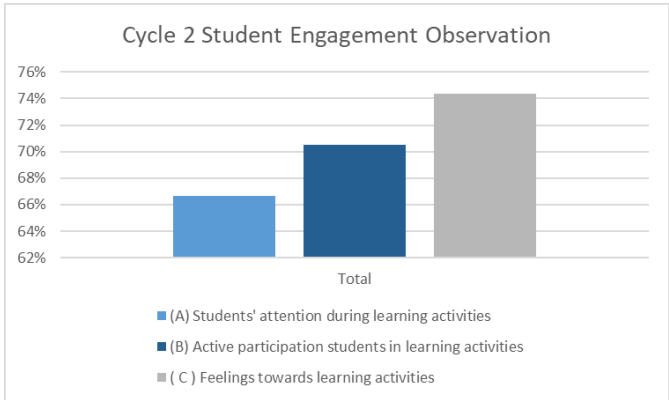


FIGURE 2 | Cycle 2 Student Engagement Observation

Figure 2 demonstrates significant improvements in student engagement during Cycle 2 compared to Cycle 1. Attention during learning activities (A) increased to 67% (from 46% in Cycle 1), active participation (B) increased to 71% (from 47%), and positive feelings toward learning (C) reached 74% (from 57%). These notable gains suggest that instructional adjustments made between cycles, such as incorporating more interactive word games and collaborative activities, effectively enhanced both behavioral and emotional engagement. The highest score in category (C) reinforces the critical role of motivation and classroom climate in language learning, while the balanced growth across all three indicators (A, B, C) reflects a more holistic improvement in student involvement.

To determine whether there was a significant difference between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, a comparative test was employed. To select the appropriate test, the researcher first examined the data distribution using the Shapiro–Wilk normality test. The average scores from each cycle (Lesson 1, Lesson 2, and Lesson 3) were calculated and tested for normality. The significance value (Sig.) for the average of Cycle 1 was 0.580, and for Cycle 2 it was 0.507.

Since both values were greater than 0.05, it was concluded that the data from both cycles did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution, thus meeting the assumption of normality.

TABLE 3 | Paired T Test Results of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2

Name	Average		Paired T Test
	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	
A	71,33	76,67	Mean: -8.66718 Standard Deviation: 3.38335 Std Error Mean: 0.93837 t-value: -9.236 df: 12 P (2-tailed): 0.000
AFA	83,00	88,00	
AAA	72,67	85,00	
BFA	77,33	84,67	
F	74,00	79,67	
FAJ	81,00	91,33	
GBZK	79,00	84,67	
MI	72,67	80,67	
M	78,67	84,67	
MSD	76,33	84,33	
MZA	74,67	90,00	
NMX	74,67	85,00	
PAR	74,67	88,00	

Given the normal distribution of the data, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether the mean scores of the two cycles differed significantly. Table 3 presents the results. The paired t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two cycles, with a mean difference of -8.67 (SD = 3.38, SE = 0.94). The obtained t-value was -9.236 with 12 degrees of freedom, and the p-value was .000 ($p < .05$), indicating a highly significant difference. These findings show that the mean scores in Cycle 2 were significantly higher than those in Cycle 1, suggesting that the implementation of the word association recitation technique positively impacted students' vocabulary acquisition.

The next instrument was “The New Vocabulary Test” administered before and after the CAR. A comparison of the Pre-Test and Post-Test scores revealed significant progress in learners' vocabulary acquisition following the completion of both instructional cycles. The average Pre-Test score across all students was 49.23, which increased to 72.23 in the Post-Test, a remarkable improvement of 23 points (46.7%). Notably, every student showed progress, with the most dramatic gains observed among those who began with lower proficiency. For instance, Student F improved from 27 to 60 (a 122% increase), and Student AAA rose from 47 to 73 (55.3%). Even high-performing students, such as NMX, who started with a score of 87, advanced to 93, demonstrating that the instructional method was beneficial for learners at all proficiency levels.

The results underscore the overall effectiveness of the word association recitation. The most outstanding progress was seen in Student FAJ, who improved from 43 to 90 (109.3%), and Student AFA, who rose from 60 to 80 (33.3%). The consistent upward trend across all learners, regardless of their initial proficiency or prior experience, indicates that the methodology effectively addressed diverse learning needs.

These findings provide strong evidence for the value of the implemented teaching strategies in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL students.

TABLE 4 | Pre-Test and Post-Test Score

Name	English in Primary School	Pre-Test	Post Test
A	No	37	50
AFA	Yes	60	80
AAA	Yes	47	73
BFA	No	27	53
F	No	27	60
FAJ	Yes	43	90
GBZK	Yes	73	93
MI	Yes	60	77
M	Yes	53	83
MSD	Yes	47	73
MZA	No	30	53
NMX	No	87	93
PAR	Yes	53	83

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents significant challenges for beginners, particularly in the initial stages. The study’s findings underscore the tangible impact of word association recitation as an effective intervention for EFL learners. Prior to its implementation, observational data revealed noticeable gaps in vocabulary mastery between students with prior English education and those without. These learners struggled not only to retain new words but also to pronounce the accurately, reflecting a common challenge in early-stage language acquisition, where fragmented knowledge impedes both comprehension and expression (Nation, 2001).

Without a foundational lexicon, students struggle to comprehend instructions, express ideas, or engage in simple conversations, which can lead to frustration and disengagement (Krashen, 1982). The psychological impacts of these difficulties often manifest as anxiety and self-doubt, further raising the affective filter, a mental block that impedes language processing (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022).

Vocabulary acquisition is an ongoing process of learning new words for everyday use serves as the foundation for mastering any language (Baker, 2015). It involves helping students to understand the meanings of new words and concepts across various contexts and academic content areas. Building on the principles of gamified learning, word games, such as crosswords, Scrabble, word searches, or digital platforms like Wordle, offer targeted benefits for EFL learners. These activities align with the testing effect, a cognitive phenomenon in which the active retrieval of information strengthens long-term memory (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022). Supporting this, a study by Kabiri and Ghafoori (2015) demonstrated that word games not only improved immediate vocabulary recall but also enhanced long-term retention, as shown by delayed post-test scores

administered two weeks after treatment.

The Implementation of Word Association Recitation with EFL Students

The CAR is considered successful if at least 80% of students meet the minimum completeness criteria for learning outcomes at the end of each cycle. This indicates that the majority of students should achieve the required level of understanding and performance as outlined in the learning objectives. Student achievement is primarily measured through their performance on assessments, which are designed not only to reinforce understanding but also to evaluate learning outcomes. In Indonesia, the recommended minimum passing grade for English at the junior high school level is 75.

During the first cycle, the students’ average score was 74.5, slightly below the minimum passing grade. More than 60 % of students received failing scores, with the lowest being 66. Many Indonesian junior high school students struggle with learning English due to factors such as ineffective teaching methods, lack of motivation, and limited practice opportunities (Lestari, 2023). In addition, some students experience anxiety when learning a foreign language, which creates barriers to interaction and inhibits their ability to express themselves verbally (Hidayati, 2022).

In the second cycle, the class median increased to 82, with all students scoring above the minimum passing grade. This improvement may be attributed to the cycle’s focus on reading and pronouncing the text collectively. When students read aloud together after hearing the teacher’s model, their confidence increases as they practice pronunciation collaboratively (Wahyuni, 2022).

To determine whether there was a significant difference between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, a paired t-test was used. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two cycles. The average scores in Cycle 2 were higher than those in Cycle 1, indicating that the implementation of the word association recitation technique positively impacted students’ vocabulary acquisition Cycle 2.

The Use of Word Association Recitation in Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition among EFL Students

Success in this study was defined by achieving a minimum of 80% in assessments related to vocabulary mastery, based on the established measurement indicators. The assessment tool used to measure vocabulary mastery was “The New Vocabulary Level Test”.

The comparison between Pre-Test and Post-Test scores revealed notable progress in learners' vocabulary acquisition after completing both instructional cycles. The average Pre-Test score was 49.23, which increased to 72.23 in the Post-Test, a remarkable improvement of 23 points (46.7%). Notably, every student demonstrated progress, with the most dramatic gains observed among those who began with lower proficiency. These results underscore that word association recitation effectively enhanced vocabulary acquisition. The consistent upward trend across all learners, regardless of their starting level or prior experience, indicates that the methodology successfully addressed diverse learning needs.

Post-intervention results further demonstrated measurable, albeit modest, improvement. The number of

students achieving scores above the KKM increased, and a statistically significant difference was found between the two cycles, suggesting enhanced vocabulary retention. These findings align with Hasyim's (2018) study, which reported statistically significant improvement in the vocabulary at 31 grade VIIIA students at SMP Muhammadiyah Al Amin Sorong through the use of word association games. Similarly, Lube & Nuraeni's (2020) found significance vocabulary gains among 30 seventh-grade students at SMP Muslimin Cililin through word games. In line with these, Totti (2024) conducted classroom action research with grade VIII C students at SMP Santa Monika, reporting a 70% improvement in completion rates between cycles.

Limitations and Implications

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, because it was conducted as classroom action research, the teacher's dual role as both instructor and evaluator may have introduced bias in the implementation and assessment processes. Second, the duration of the study was restricted to two cycles, as data collection needed to be completed before the semester examinations (October 29th - December 2nd, 2024). Third, challenges arose in the ethical procedures, as only the principle's written agreement and parents' verbal consent were obtained due to time constraints. Fourth, the observational sheet employed had not undergone prior reliability and validity testing, which may have affected the accuracy of the classroom data collected.

Additionally, the research was conducted in a single private Islamic junior high school in Semarang, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other EFL contexts with different cultural or institutional settings. Despite these constraints, the results demonstrate the potential of word association recitation as a practical and accessible strategy for improving vocabulary acquisition. Future studies are encouraged to obtain comprehensive written consent, employ validated observation instruments, extend the duration of intervention cycles, and include a broader range of schools to enhance the reliability, validity, and applicability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated that the word association recitation technique effectively enhanced vocabulary acquisition among EFL students. Quantitative results from the paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant improvement in vocabulary scores from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2, with a mean difference of -8.67, a t-value of -9.236, and a p-value of .000, indicating substantial progress. Additionally, results from the New Vocabulary Test conducted before and after the intervention confirmed its improvement.

Integrating word association recitation into classroom routines can serve as a low-cost and accessible strategy for addressing vocabulary gaps, particularly in resource-limited contexts. Incorporating interactive, gamified techniques into junior high school English programs is recommended to enhance both learning outcomes and student motivation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all participants, colleagues, and research assistants who contributed to the completion of this study. Special thanks are extended to the English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang for the academic and institutional support that made this research possible.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix I

Score of Cycle 1 and 2 Learning Assessments

TABLE 1 | Score of the First Cycle

Name	Cycle 1		
	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3
A	70	74	70
AFA	84	85	80
AAA	72	80	66
BFA	74	74	84
F	80	72	70
FAJ	80	85	78
GBZK	78	85	74
MI	74	72	72
M	76	80	80
MSD	74	85	70
MZA	76	76	72
NMX	70	80	74
PAR	70	76	78

TABLE 2 | Score of the second Cycle

Name	Cycle 2		
	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3
A	75	75	80
AFA	90	84	90
AAA	90	75	90
BFA	90	80	84
F	75	80	84
FAJ	90	96	88
GBZK	90	80	84
MI	75	83	84
M	90	80	84
MSD	75	90	88
MZA	90	80	100
NMX	75	90	90
PAR	90	80	94

Appendix II

Observation Sheets

Observation sheets are records containing the results of observations conducted collaboratively by the researcher and the teacher, focusing on the variables under study. In this research, the observation sheet was designed based on indicators of activities carried out during the Word Association Recitation. These included students' attention during learning activities, their active participation in classroom tasks, and their positive feelings toward the learning process.

The indicators for the observation sheets in this classroom action research centered on three key criteria: students' attention, active participation, and feelings toward learning activities. Attention was measured by students' ability to remain focused on the teacher's explanations, tasks, and discussions, including maintaining eye contact, listening attentively, and responding when prompted. Active participation was evaluated through students' engagement in classroom activities such as asking questions, contributing to discussions, and completing individual or group tasks, reflecting their involvement and initiative in the learning process. Lastly, feelings toward learning activities were assessed by observing students' body language, facial expressions, and verbal feedback to gauge enthusiasm, motivation, or discomfort during lessons.

Together, these indicators provided a comprehensive picture of students' engagement and emotional responses, which are essential for evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching strategies employed in the classroom. The criteria for assessing students' vocabulary mastery through word association recitation were calculated using the following formula:

Formula	Value Range	Criteria
Percentage = (Score obtained / Maximum score) x 100 %	$0\% \leq VR < 30\%$	Insufficient
	$30\% \leq VR < 60\%$	Adequate
	$60\% \leq VR \leq 100\%$	Good

Cycle 1 Observation Sheet Scores

Indicator	Descriptor	Score
(A) Students' attention during learning activities	1. Focusing on the teacher's explanation	6
	2. Taking notes on the teacher's explanation	5
	3. Reading the teaching material	7
	4. Participating seriously in the assigned tasks	6
	5. Showing eagerness to participate in the tasks	4
	6. Being persistent and not easily discouraged in completing tasks	8
(B) Active participation in learning activities	1. Answering the teacher's questions	8
	2. Asking the teacher questions	8
	3. Expressing opinions	6
	4. Actively making observations	4
	5. Actively participating in classroom activities	5
	6. Responding to classmates' answers	6
	7. Discussing with group members	7
	8. Summarizing learning outcomes	5
(C) Feelings towards learning activities	1. Coming to class on time	9
	2. Bringing stationery and books	11
	3. Having complete notes of teaching materials	6
	4. Completing assignments on time	8
	5. Taking responsibility for tasks	7
	6. Remaining calm and not restless during lessons	4
	7. Not easily bored and give up on tasks	4
	8. Being cheerful during classroom activities	10

Cycle 2 Observation Sheet Scores

Indicator	Descriptor	Cycle 2
(A) Students' attention during learning activities	1. Focusing on the teacher's explanation	9
	2. Taking notes on the teacher's explanation	8
	3. Reading the teaching material	10
	4. Participating seriously in the assigned tasks	9
	5. Showing eagerness to participate in the tasks	8
	6. Being persistent and not easily discouraged in completing tasks	8
(B) Active participation students in learning activities	1. Answering the teacher's questions	10
	2. Asking the teacher questions	7
	3. Expressing opinions	8
	4. Actively making observations	9
	5. Actively participating in classroom activities	10
	6. Responding to classmotes' answers	11
	7. Discussing with group members	12
	8. Summarizing learning outcomes	9
(C) Feelings towards learning activities	1. Coming to class on time	13
	2. Bringing stationery and books	13
	3. Having complete notes of teaching materials	8
	4. Completing assignments on time	10
	5. Taking responsibility for tasks	8
	6. Remaining calm and not restless during lessons	6
	7. Not easily bored and give up on tasks	8
	8. Being cheerful during classroom activities	12

Appendix III

The 1,000 Word Level Vocabulary Levels Test (Part A)

Name : _____

Date : _____

	boy	rent	report	size	station	thing
How big or small something is						
Place buses and trains go to						
Young man						

	ear	gold	lake	letter	office	people
Information sent to people						
Men and women						
Place for working						

	fellow	hat	ice	joke	light	system
Funny story						
Man or boy						
Something worn on your head						

	date	forest	mistake	news	record	shop
Latest information						
Place with many trees						
Something that is not right						

	bar	conversation	neighbor	rain	rubbish	shirt
Person who lives nearby						
Things that are thrown away						
Type of clothing						

	continue	cook	phone	pull	sail	share
Hold and move something toward yourself						
Keep happening						
Use together with others						

	enter	finish	happen	own	sing	worry
End						
Go inside						
Have something that is yours						

	arrive	collect	consider	glance	need	pack
Think about something						
Reach the place you are going						
Look quickly at something						

	affordable	beautiful	boring	dry	rough	tall
Higher than normal						
Not interesting						
Not flat						

	closed	dirty	empty	musical	orange	sad
Having nothing						
Not clean						
Unhappy						

Appendix IV

The 1,000 Word Level Vocabulary Levels Test (Part B)

Name : _____

Date : _____

	choice	computer	garden	photograph	price	week
Cost						
Picture						
Place where things grow outside						

	eye	father	night	van	voice	year
Body part that sees						
Parent who is a man						
Part of the day with no sun						

	center	note	state	tomorrow	uncle	winter
Brother of your mother or father						
Middle						
Short piece of writing						

	box	brother	horse	hour	house	plan
Family member						
Sixty minutes						
Way of doing things						

	animal	bath	crime	grass	law	shoulder
Green leaves that cover the ground						
Place to wash						
Top end of your arm						

	drink	educate	forget	laugh	prepare	suit
Get ready						
Make a happy sound						
Not remember						

	check	fight	return	tell	work	write
Do things to get money						
Go back again						
Make sure						

	bring	can	reply	stare	understand	wish
Say or write an answer to somebody						
Carry to another place						
Look at for a long time						

	alone	bad	cold	green	loud	main
Most important						
Not good						
Not hot						

	awful	definite	exciting	general	mad	sweet
Certain						
Usual						
Very bad						