Open Access
IHTIMAM: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab
Vol. 9, No. 01, June 2026
https://journal.staimsyk.ac.id/index.php/Ihtimam/index

The Effectiveness of Crossword Puzzle Learning Media on Vocabulary Mastery of Grade VII Students of SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros

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ARTICLE INFO
Article history:
Received
May 20, 2026
Revised
June 07, 2026
Accepted
June 27, 2026

Abstract

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of Arabic language learning, as it supports the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. However, many students experience difficulties in acquiring and retaining Arabic vocabulary due to the continued reliance on conventional teaching methods that provide limited opportunities for active engagement. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of crossword puzzle learning media in improving the Arabic vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group design was employed. The sample consisted of 40 students selected through purposive sampling, with 20 students assigned to the experimental group and 20 to the control group. The experimental group was taught using crossword puzzle media, whereas the control group received conventional instruction. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including normality, homogeneity, and independent-samples *t*-tests with SPSS 22.0. The findings revealed that the experimental group achieved a higher mean post-test score (61.45) than the control group (47.45). The hypothesis test showed a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that crossword puzzle learning media significantly improved students' Arabic vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, the media enhanced students' motivation, participation, and engagement, suggesting that crossword puzzles provide an effective and innovative strategy for Arabic vocabulary instruction at the junior high school level.

Keywords: Crossword Puzzles, Learning Media, Mastery of Mufradat, Arabic Language Learning, Quasi Experiments.

Published by STAI Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta
Website https://journal.staimsyk.ac.id/index.php/Ihtimam/index
ISSN 2774-4302
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INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning plays a crucial role in education because it serves not only as a means of communication but also as the language of the Qur'an and a primary source of Islamic studies. Arabic language education is an effort undertaken by educators to equip students with communication skills and language comprehension, enabling them to master and comprehend the contents of books and various other reading materials in Arabic (Rubini, 2020). In the Arabic language learning process, mastery of the vocabulary is a fundamental aspect that determines students' success in mastering listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Learning objectives are a key aspect that educators need to

understand, as by understanding the objectives to be achieved, educators can determine and adapt the learning process to suit existing conditions (Astuti et al., 2021). Arabic language learning functions as a language of religion and science, as well as a means of communication (Astuti et al., n.d.). In Arabic, vocabulary is known as vocabulary, while in English it is called vocabulary. Vocabulary is a collection of words mastered by individuals or specific social groups as part of a language. Horn explains that vocabulary is a collection of words that form the building blocks of a language (Kurniawati et al., 2019).

Good vocabulary mastery will help students understand learning materials and use Arabic communicatively. According to Tarigan, vocabulary mastery is a crucial element of language skills because a person's ability to understand and use a language is greatly influenced by the size of their vocabulary (Tarigan, 2015). Similarly, Effendy states that vocabulary is the primary foundation in Arabic language learning, as language skills will not develop without adequate vocabulary mastery (Effendy & Arab, n.d.). Hermawan also emphasizes that vocabulary mastery is the first step that students must master before learning other Arabic language skills (Hermawan, 2013). One of the goals of learning Arabic is to develop language skills and foster a positive attitude toward Arabic through mastery of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Primaningtyas, 2018).

Developments in language learning research in recent years have shown that the use of interactive learning media has a positive impact on student learning outcomes. International research by Alqahtani explains that game-based learning is effective in improving vocabulary mastery and student motivation in foreign language learning (Yi-Hsiang & Yen-Ling, 2021). Research by Chen and Hsu shows that interactive learning media can increase student participation and create a more communicative learning environment (Chen & Tsai, 2025). Furthermore, research by Kim and Park states that educational games are effective in increasing student engagement in the language learning process (Lee & Park, 2020). Research by Wang and Lee also found that the use of games in language learning can help improve students' vocabulary retention and comprehension (Jia et al., 2025). Another international study by Ahmed explains that the use of game-based activities can increase interest in learning foreign languages in secondary school students (Alghamdi et al., 2026).

In the national context, various studies have also shown similar results. Fajriah's research shows that the use of picture cards can improve students' mastery of Arabic vocabulary (Fajriah, 2015). Nurhayati's research explains that language games are effective in helping students understand and remember vocabulary more easily (Nurhayati, 2021). Fauziah found that game media can increase students' motivation to learn Arabic because learning becomes more interesting and interactive (Fauziah et al., 2025). Rahmawati's research also shows that the use of educational games can increase student participation and learning outcomes in Arabic learning (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Furthermore, Maulida's research states that interactive learning media has a positive influence on improving students' mastery of Arabic vocabulary (Maulida, 2022). These research results indicate that the use of game-based learning media can be an effective alternative in improving students' mastery of vocabulary.

However, research on the use of crossword puzzles in Arabic vocabulary learning at the junior high school level is still relatively limited, particularly among seventh-grade

students at SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros. Most previous studies have focused on games in general and have not specifically examined the effectiveness of crossword puzzles on students' mastery of Arabic vocabulary. Furthermore, previous research generally focuses solely on learning outcomes without considering student activity and engagement during the learning process. Therefore, this study presents a novel approach in applying crossword puzzles to improve Arabic vocabulary mastery through a quasi-experimental approach with a Non-Equivalent Control Group Design. This research emphasizes not only improving student learning outcomes but also increasing student motivation, participation, and activeness in Arabic learning.

Based on initial observations at SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros, it was found that most students still experience difficulty understanding and remembering Arabic vocabulary. The learning process, which is still dominated by conventional methods, results in students being less active and easily bored during the learning process. Many educators tend to use a one-way, teacher-dominated lecture strategy, while students tend to be passive. However, as previously stated, students will learn more if they are given the opportunity to study in groups (Harimi, 2018). According to Arsyad (2017), the use of appropriate learning media can help increase students' attention and motivation, thereby making the learning process more effective. Daryanto (2016) also stated that learning media can create an engaging and enjoyable learning environment. One such medium is crossword puzzles, as they involve thinking, remembering, and matching vocabulary, allowing students to learn while having fun. Therefore, the use of crossword puzzles is expected to help improve the mastery of Arabic vocabulary in seventh-grade students of SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros.

Based on this description, the research problem is formulated as to whether the use of crossword puzzles as a learning medium is effective in improving the mastery of Arabic vocabulary in seventh-grade students of SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros. The aim of this study is to determine the effectiveness of using crossword puzzle learning media on the mastery of Arabic vocabulary of class VII students of SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design to test the effectiveness of crossword puzzles on students' mastery of Arabic vocabulary. The research design used a Non-Equivalent Control Group Design, as the researchers did not randomize the study subjects but instead used pre-formed classes. The study was conducted in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros, located in Sawaru Village, Camba District, Maros Regency, South Sulawesi.

The population in this study was all 40 seventh-grade students at SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros, divided into two classes. The sampling technique used was total sampling due to the relatively small population size, so all members of the population were included in the study sample. Class VII A, consisting of 20 students, was designated as the experimental class and received treatment using crossword puzzles. Class VII B, consisting of 20 students, served as the control class, learning using conventional methods without crossword puzzles.

This study involved two variables: crossword puzzles as the independent variable (X) and Arabic vocabulary mastery as the dependent variable (Y). Crossword puzzles are

defined as learning media that encourage student engagement through collaborative and enjoyable activities of finding and filling in vocabulary in puzzle form. Vocabulary mastery is defined as students' ability to understand and use Arabic vocabulary taught during the learning process.

Data collection was conducted using a written test instrument administered before and after the treatment. The research instrument consisted of 20 questions covering the topic of البيت (al-bayt), consisting of 10 multiple-choice questions and 10 fill-in-the-blank questions. For the multiple-choice questions, each correct answer was given a score of 1, while for the fill-in-the-blank questions, each correct answer was given a score of 2, and an incorrect answer was given a score of 0, resulting in a maximum total score of 30. The same instrument was used as a pre-test to determine students' initial abilities and a post-test to measure improvement in vocabulary mastery after the learning process. Before use, the instrument was developed based on the learning objectives and vocabulary material taught to seventh-grade students, ensuring it aligned with the competencies being measured.

The research procedure began with a pre-test administered to the experimental and control classes to determine students' initial abilities in mastering Arabic vocabulary. Next, the experimental class was taught using crossword puzzles, while the control class underwent conventional learning using the teacher's usual approach. In the experimental class, the teacher prepared crossword puzzles based on the vocabulary being studied, explained the instructions, actively guided students in solving the puzzles, and provided feedback on their answers. After all treatments were completed, both classes received a post-test to determine changes in learning outcomes following the learning process. A comparison of the pre-test and post-test results was used to determine the effectiveness of using crossword puzzles on students' vocabulary mastery.

The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe the characteristics of the data by calculating the minimum value, maximum value, mean, standard deviation, variance, and percentage. Meanwhile, inferential statistical analysis was conducted using normality and homogeneity tests to ensure that the assumptions of parametric analysis were met. Next, a hypothesis test was conducted using an independent samples t-test at a significance level of 0.05 to determine the difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control classes. The research hypothesis stated that the use of crossword puzzles as a learning medium is effective in improving students' mastery of Arabic vocabulary compared to conventional learning.

Although the method used allowed the researcher to obtain an empirical picture of the effectiveness of crossword puzzles in real-life learning situations, this study has several limitations. The study only involved seventh-grade students from one school, with a relatively limited sample size, and focused on a specific vocabulary topic, namely the theme of Arabic. Therefore, the results of this study need to be interpreted with caution if they are to be generalized to a wider population. However, the research procedures detailed in this study are expected to serve as a reference for other researchers replicating or developing similar research in different contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of using crossword puzzles as a learning medium on the mastery of Arabic vocabulary in seventh-grade students at SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros. The study was conducted in two classes: an experimental class treated with crossword puzzles and a control class taught using conventional learning. Data were obtained through pre-tests and post-tests to determine students' initial and final abilities in mastering Arabic vocabulary.

Based on the results of descriptive statistical analysis, it was found that students' initial abilities in both classes were still relatively low. The experimental class obtained an average pre-test score of 25.00, with a highest score of 47 and a lowest score of 7. Meanwhile, the control class obtained an average pre-test score of 17.95, with a highest score of 30 and a lowest score of 7. These results indicate that most students still experienced difficulties in understanding and remembering Arabic vocabulary before the learning treatment.

After the learning process, post-test results showed an increase in vocabulary mastery in both classes. However, the improvement in learning outcomes in the experimental class was greater than in the control class. In the experimental class, the average post-test score increased to 61.45 with the highest score reaching 100 and the lowest score of 13. Meanwhile, in the control class, the average post-test score increased to 47.45 with the highest score of 93 and the lowest score of 10. These results indicate that the use of crossword puzzle learning media has a better influence on improving students' mastery of vocabulary compared to conventional learning.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Results of Students' Vocabulary Mastery

Class	*Pre-test*	*Post-test*	Improvement
Eksperimen	25,00	61,45	36,45
Kontrol	17,95	47,45	29,50

The table shows that the average score for the experimental class increased by 36.45, while the control class only experienced an increase of 29.50. This indicates that the use of crossword puzzles was more effective in improving students' mastery of Arabic vocabulary.

Furthermore, the frequency distribution of post-test scores for the experimental class shows that most students scored in the medium to high category. The highest frequency was in the 73–87 range, at 25%. These results indicate that after using crossword puzzles, students' ability to understand and remember Arabic vocabulary improved significantly. Meanwhile, in the control class, most students still scored in the low to medium category. This indicates that conventional learning has not been able to optimally improve students' mastery of vocabulary.

To determine the effectiveness of using crossword puzzles, a t-test was conducted. The analysis yielded a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. The results show that H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted, which means that there is a significant influence of the use of crossword puzzle learning media on the mastery of Arabic vocabulary of class VII students of SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros.

Table 2. Hypothesis Test Results

Significant Value	Significant Level	Information
0,00	0,05	H_0 ditolak dan H_1 diterima

The results of this study indicate that crossword puzzles can improve student learning outcomes by making the learning process more active, engaging, and enjoyable.

Throughout the learning process, students appeared more enthusiastic and motivated. Students not only listened to the teacher's explanations but also engaged directly in finding answers, matching vocabulary words, and solving the puzzles. These activities helped students more easily understand and remember Arabic vocabulary.

The use of learning media also helped increase student motivation and participation in learning Arabic vocabulary. This fun and challenging learning environment was a key factor in ensuring students remained engaged and did not get bored easily during the learning process.

The use of crossword puzzles also helped create a learning environment that was not monotonous. Learning that previously tended to be teacher-centered shifted to more interactive and student-centered learning. Students became more active in asking questions, discussing, and working together to complete learning tasks. Thus, crossword puzzles not only improved students' vocabulary mastery but also increased their activeness and motivation throughout the learning process.

The findings of this study align with the theory put forward by Arsyad, who states that learning media can improve students' attention, motivation, and learning outcomes (Azhar, 2017). Furthermore, Daryanto explains that learning media helps students understand material in a more concrete and engaging way, thus making the learning process more effective. In the context of Arabic language learning, the use of creative learning media is essential to prevent boredom and facilitate student comprehension of the vocabulary being studied (Daryanto, 2016).

The results of this study align with Fajriah's findings, which state that game-based learning media plays an effective role in improving students' Arabic vocabulary mastery. These findings indicate that active student involvement through play activities can facilitate more meaningful memorization and understanding of vocabulary. Furthermore, these findings also corroborate Rahmawati's research, which asserts that the use of educational games not only improves learning outcomes but also increases student motivation and participation in Arabic language learning (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Thus, game media can be understood as a learning tool that supports the creation of an interactive and student-centered learning environment.

Theoretically, the results of this study are relevant to the view that vocabulary mastery is the primary foundation for Arabic language learning, as language skills will not develop optimally without adequate vocabulary mastery. Crossword puzzles provide students with the opportunity to review, match, and recall vocabulary in a fun context, thus supporting the active learning process as proposed by activity-based learning theory. Student engagement in solving puzzles also encourages thought processes, associations of meaning, and memory reinforcement, ultimately contributing to improved vocabulary mastery.

The novelty of this study lies in the application of crossword puzzles in Arabic vocabulary learning for seventh-grade students at SMP IT Yahbon Tollu Maros using a quasi-experimental approach. Unlike previous studies, which generally focused on general game media, this study specifically examines the effectiveness of crossword puzzles tailored to the vocabulary material and students' ability levels. This adjustment makes

learning more contextual and relevant to students' needs, and focuses not only on improving learning outcomes but also on increasing student activity, motivation, and engagement during the learning process.

Based on the analysis and dialogue with previous theories and research, it can be concluded that crossword puzzles are an effective learning medium for Arabic language learning, particularly for vocabulary. This medium not only improves students' vocabulary mastery but also contributes to creating more active, engaging, and meaningful learning. Therefore, crossword puzzles can be used as an alternative, innovative learning medium to support the development of Arabic language learning in schools.

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