

Improving Early Childhood Basic English Vocabulary Recognition Skills through the Mystery Box Game for Group B Children at RA Al-Kautsar

Anastasya¹

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton, Sulawesi Tenggara, Indonesia

e-mail: *anastasya261@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language learning, particularly English, needs to be introduced from an early age, as this period marks a crucial stage in rapid language development. However, in reality, many young children still struggle to recognize and pronounce basic English vocabulary. This study aims to improve the ability of children aged 5–6 years to recognize basic English vocabulary through the Mystery Box game. The research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) method using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, conducted in two cycles consisting of three meetings each. The research subjects were 15 Group B children at RA Al-Kautsar. The findings revealed that the implementation of the Mystery Box game significantly enhanced children's vocabulary skills. Prior to the intervention, only 27% of the children demonstrated understanding of basic vocabulary, while after the second cycle, 93% of the children achieved the "Very Well Developed" category. Therefore, the Mystery Box game proved to be an effective medium for improving early childhood mastery of

basic English vocabulary.

Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in early childhood development and should be introduced as early as the toddler stage (Na'imah, 2022; Pamungkas & Amin, 2021). Language skills are fundamental to children's cognitive development and the formation of social competence (Afdhilla & Mahendra, 2020). Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium to express feelings, needs, and thoughts, as well as to strengthen social bonds with the surrounding environment.

In the era of globalization, learning a foreign language—especially English—has become an essential skill for children's future development (Alfarisy, 2021; Yutanto et al., 2023). Preschool-aged children are in a critical period known as the “golden age” of language development, during which the brain can absorb new information rapidly and effectively (Triyanto & Astuti, 2021). Therefore, a key strategy in preparing children for global challenges is to introduce English from an early age (Na'imah, 2022; Susfenti, 2021).

However, in practice, teaching English vocabulary to young learners can be challenging if it is not supported by engaging and developmentally appropriate teaching methods (Fadlan et al., 2021; Rahmaniah et al., 2021). Based on preliminary observations at RA Al-Kautsar, several Group B children had difficulty recognizing and pronouncing basic English words. This problem was mainly due to

unappealing learning materials and monotonous teaching methods that relied only on static pictures and songs. To overcome these issues, interactive and age-appropriate teaching strategies are required (Hartanti & Kurniawan, 2022).

One effective approach is to develop children's cognitive and linguistic abilities simultaneously through educational play activities (Afdhilla & Mahendra, 2020). Learning media such as the *Mystery Box* game are considered suitable because they use concrete objects that stimulate children's sensory exploration and curiosity (Veryawan et al., 2021). This game combines elements of surprise and discovery with hands-on learning activities, where children take an object from a closed box and guess or name the hidden item in English (Ariska & Suyadi, 2020).

Such activities not only enhance children's vocabulary but also improve their confidence, concentration, and motor coordination (Susanti & Muryanti, 2023). The *Mystery Box* game provides a meaningful and enjoyable learning experience that encourages active participation and supports holistic child development.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the *Mystery Box* game on improving early childhood basic English vocabulary among Group B children at RA Al-Kautsar. Using the Classroom Action Research (CAR) model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, this study aims to create a more engaging and meaningful learning process that encourages children's active participation in English lessons while

enhancing their mastery of basic vocabulary (Fasha et al., 2023).

Methods

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which consists of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Fasha et al., 2023). This model was chosen because it enables teachers and researchers to improve the learning process directly through a systematic and continuous cycle of actions.

The research focused on enhancing the quality of English language learning in early childhood classrooms. The CAR approach was considered appropriate as it allows collaboration between teachers and researchers to find practical solutions to real classroom problems (Dewi et al., 2023). The study was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of three meetings with different learning topics such as the introduction of animals, fruits, colors, eating utensils, and school supplies (Susfenti, 2021).

The participants were 15 children aged 5–6 years from Group B at RA Al-Kautsar, located in an urban area. The participants were selected based on preliminary observations showing that most children had difficulty recognizing and pronouncing basic English vocabulary (Rahmaniah et al., 2021). The study was carried out in May 2025, over two weeks, with learning activities conducted daily from 08:00 to 10:15 WITA.

The research procedure began with the planning stage, in which the

researcher and the teacher collaboratively designed daily lesson plans (RPPH) emphasizing play-based activities using the Mystery Box medium. The core learning activity involved children taking objects from the box, naming them in English, and linking them with corresponding pictures or real objects. The learning design also incorporated the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach to ensure that children actively participated through movement, speech, and social interaction (Fadlan et al., 2021).

The next stage was action implementation, where the teacher carried out the lesson according to the prepared plans. The teacher acted as a facilitator by encouraging the children through verbal praise, visual cues, and the use of concrete objects to help them understand the meaning of new vocabulary (Safitri et al., 2021). The children were motivated to speak confidently, interact with peers, and pronounce words correctly through enjoyable and exploratory activities (Ariska & Suyadi, 2020).

During the observation stage, the researcher monitored children's activeness and language performance throughout the learning process. Three main indicators were assessed: (1) the ability to name objects in English, (2) the ability to pronounce words correctly, and (3) the ability to associate English words with corresponding objects (Sudarma et al., 2023). All observations were systematically recorded for further analysis at the end of each cycle.

The reflection stage involved analyzing observation results to

determine the effectiveness of the actions taken in improving children's vocabulary skills. The reflections were used to plan adjustments for the next cycle. For example, in the first cycle, it was found that some children had difficulty maintaining focus, so in the second cycle the box color was changed to a more attractive one, and the learning topic was announced in advance to help children prepare and stay engaged (Dewi et al., 2023).

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to track children's learning progress (Rahmaniah et al., 2021), interviews were used to validate observation findings and gather teachers' insights on children's responses, while documentation included photos and field notes as supporting evidence (Avissany, 2023; Dewi et al., 2023).

The research instruments consisted of observation sheets, interview guides, and documentation records. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data were obtained from observation results calculated in percentages to describe the progress achieved by children in each indicator. Qualitative data were derived from field notes and interviews that described changes in behavior, motivation, and participation during the learning process (Susanti & Muryanti, 2023).

The success indicator of this study was achieved when at least 80% of the children reached the "Very Well Developed" (BSB) category in mastering basic English vocabulary, including the ability to recognize,

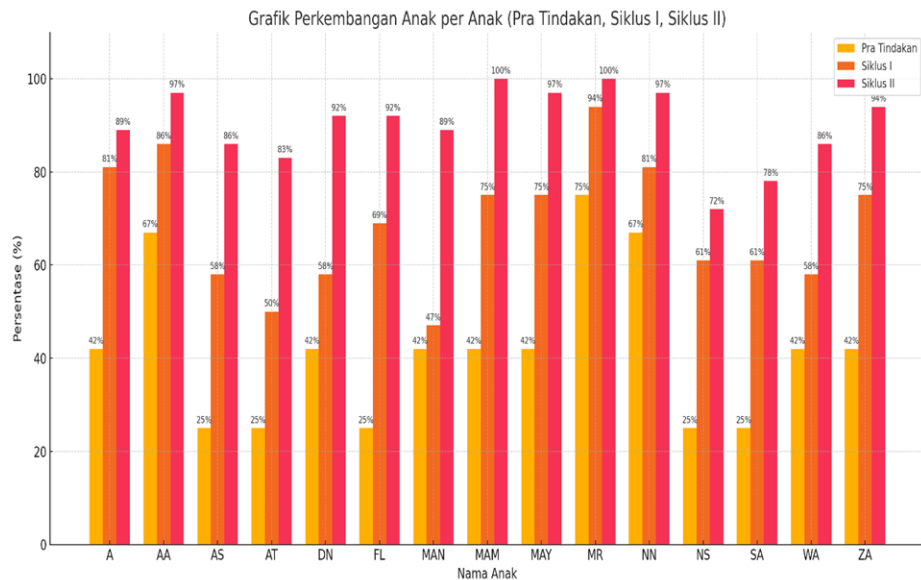
pronounce, and associate words with relevant objects (Susfenti, 2021). Therefore, the CAR approach based on the Mystery Box game was expected to create a joyful, concrete, and meaningful learning experience for young learners.

Result and Discussions

This study was conducted in May 2025 at RA Al-Kautsar, involving 15 Group B children aged 5–6 years. The learning activities were carried out over two cycles, each consisting of three sessions. Every cycle focused on improving the children’s ability to recognize and pronounce basic English vocabulary through the *Mystery Box* game. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation throughout the implementation process.

Observations during the **pre-cycle** indicated that the children’s English vocabulary ability was still low. Most of the children were unable to recognize or correctly pronounce basic English words such as *cat*, *apple*, *red*, *spoon*, or *book*. Out of the 15 children, 5 children (33%) were categorized as *Not Yet Developed (BB)*, 7 children (47%) were *Beginning to Develop (MB)*, and only 3 children (20%) were *Developing as Expected (BSH)*.

Graph 1. The Development of pra-cycle, Cycle I and Cycle II



After the implementation of the *Mystery Box* learning media in **Cycle I**, there was a noticeable improvement in the children's ability to recognize and name basic vocabulary. Observation results showed that 4 children (27%) achieved the *Very Well Developed (BSB)* category, 5 children (33%) were in the *BSH* category, and 6 children (40%) were still in the *MB* category. None of the children remained in the *BB* category.

A more significant improvement was observed in **Cycle II**. The results indicated that 14 children (93%) reached the *BSB* category and 1 child (7%) was in the *BSH* category. This means that all children were able to recognize, pronounce, and associate English vocabulary with the correct objects. These findings demonstrate that the implementation of the *Mystery Box* game had a substantial positive impact on improving the basic English vocabulary of early childhood learners.

In addition to quantitative improvements, qualitative observations

revealed positive behavioral changes. The children became more enthusiastic, curious, and active during the learning sessions. They were more willing to participate, ask questions, and pronounce words in English even when unsure of accuracy. Moreover, the classroom atmosphere became more dynamic and joyful, and the children demonstrated increased confidence and attention during activities.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the *Mystery Box* game effectively enhances early childhood English vocabulary acquisition. This effectiveness can be attributed to the game's combination of surprise, sensory exploration, and social interaction. Children were directly involved in concrete learning experiences by touching, guessing, and naming objects hidden inside the box. Such sensory-based and exploratory learning experiences encourage both cognitive engagement and emotional involvement (Ariska & Suyadi, 2020; Veryawan et al., 2021).

These findings align with Susanti and Muryanti (2023), who found that the *Mystery Box* game significantly improved young children's vocabulary mastery because it engages them in enjoyable and curiosity-driven activities. Similarly, Fadlan et al. (2021) emphasize that the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is highly effective for teaching English to young children since motor activities reinforce memory retention. In this study, the combination of *Mystery Box* and TPR allowed the children to move, speak, and think simultaneously, resulting in meaningful and

memorable learning experiences.

The improvement in children's performance can also be linked to the teacher's role as a facilitator who provided continuous positive reinforcement. Verbal praise, gestures, and visual cues helped children feel motivated and confident to speak in English. This aligns with Afdhilla and Mahendra (2020), who note that learning in early childhood becomes more effective when conducted through play that involves emotional interaction and encouragement.

Beyond language development, the *Mystery Box* game also supported children's cognitive and social growth. When children guessed the objects, they engaged in logical reasoning, memory recall, and peer communication. This result is consistent with Avissany (2023), who reported a positive correlation between *Mystery Box* play activities and children's storytelling abilities. Thus, the *Mystery Box* not only enriches vocabulary but also enhances oral communication skills and social collaboration among children.

From a psychological perspective, play-based learning such as the *Mystery Box* fulfills children's intrinsic need to learn through fun and meaningful experiences. Na'imah (2022) suggests that English introduction in early childhood is most effective when delivered in a playful and motivating context. This aligns with the increased enthusiasm and engagement observed among children in the second cycle of this study.

Additional support for these findings comes from Dewi et al. (2023),

who highlight that creative teaching media—whether technology-based or tangible—significantly improve the effectiveness of early English instruction. Likewise, Rahmaniah et al. (2021) found that visually appealing materials help young learners maintain attention longer and improve vocabulary retention.

Based on the results of both cycles, the *Mystery Box* game successfully created an interactive, concrete, and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Learning shifted from a monotonous approach—limited to static pictures and songs—to an exploratory and engaging activity that stimulated children’s curiosity (Hartanti & Kurniawan, 2022). This success also supports Pamungkas and Amin (2021), who emphasize that English learning during the *golden age* should be conducted through play-based activities that stimulate all aspects of child development.

In conclusion, the *Mystery Box* game not only proved effective in enhancing children’s mastery of basic English vocabulary but also positively influenced their activeness, concentration, and participation in the learning process. It created a meaningful, engaging, and enjoyable learning experience that fostered social interaction and self-confidence, enabling children to use English words naturally according to their developmental stage.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the *Mystery Box* game successfully improved young children’s ability to recognize and use basic English vocabulary. Through interactive and

exploratory activities, children became more enthusiastic, active, and confident in pronouncing and identifying English words correctly. The improvement was evident from the consistent progress across the two learning cycles, in which the majority of children reached the *Very Well Developed* category after the second cycle of implementation.

In addition to enhancing vocabulary mastery, the *Mystery Box* game also fostered children's confidence, focus, and active participation in the learning process. The enjoyable learning atmosphere encouraged natural engagement and meaningful interaction, enabling children to learn English in a way that suited their developmental characteristics. Therefore, the *Mystery Box* game can be considered an effective alternative strategy for introducing English to early childhood learners in preschool settings.

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