



## Word wall media in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students: teacher's practices, benefits, and challenges

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to showcase teacher's practices, benefits, and challenges of applying word wall media in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students. Designed with qualitative case study, an EFL teacher of an Islamic junior high school in Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia volunteered to participate. Data were collected through interview, classroom observation, and documentation. This study employed an interactive model of data analysis. Study findings demonstrated that there were five stages in implementing word wall media, i.e. planning vocabulary, designing the word wall, placing the word wall, using the word wall, and practicing advanced use. Another finding also illustrated the benefits of using word wall media in teaching vocabulary. The word wall media could help the junior secondary school students familiarize with vocabulary, motivate them to elevate vocabulary acquisition, encourage them in reading and writing, and foster them to communicate in English. The application of word wall also benefited the EFL teacher to design vocabulary teaching and learning that suited the students' language target and manage the class in a more engaged way. Further, the teacher encountered some challenges in applying the word wall media, including student teamwork, consistency in application, and practicality of the learning media.

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## Introduction

Vocabulary has a pivotal role in the language acquisition. If learners understand why and how all these vocabulary-focused activities can increase their success in learning, they will put more effort into doing it. Teachers need much time to teach maximum vocabulary in the classroom, but most of the hours taught in the classroom are too few to teach sufficient vocabulary coverage. The success of learning new vocabulary outside of the classroom

depends, to a large extent, on motivation. Furthermore, motivation, in turn, depends on being aware of the importance of such learning (Ur, 2022).

One method of learning English in vocabulary mastery is by choosing a variety of media, choosing suitable and effective media, and making students easily remember and memorize new vocabulary given by the teacher. One of the media that teachers can use to master vocabulary is word wall media (Supraba, 2019). The primary purpose of the word wall is to help students improve their vocabulary knowledge from sight so that they can recognize the word at a glance. Word walls are visual and help students remember vocabulary well because the media can be seen anywhere and anytime. In addition, the Word Wall affects students' mastery of English vocabulary, where a media word wall is designed to enhance learning and group activities that involve students in making the media (Irawati, 2017).

Word walls can be an effective media applied to students in mastering vocabulary because the way these word walls work is by pasting parts of words or collections on walls, blackboards, bulletin boards, wall magazines, and others with large and colorful sizes so that all students are more interested and can more easily see clearly and at any time. Another word wall goal is to create a print-rich environment (Zakiyah, 2022). Based on preliminary research at one of Islamic junior secondary school in Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia, it was found that most of the 8th-grade students had mastered vocabulary. This is because the 7th-grade teacher at the junior high school has implemented the vocabulary teaching method using word walls as media. This information was conveyed directly by the 8th-grade teacher. For this reason, learning English conducted by this teacher is very interesting, especially learning to improve vocabulary mastery using word wall media. Therefore, this research intends to investigate the use of word wall media in teaching vocabulary mastery.

Word wall is a medium to improve vocabulary mastery. Teachers choose new words and print these words in bold type on cards or paper. Teachers stick the cards on the wall or bulletin board which is visible when students are active in class (Altayani, 2021). Furthermore, a word wall is a collection of words arranged systematically and displayed in large letters on the wall or other large display areas in the classroom (Novalia et al., 2019). In addition, a word wall is a learning media that is not only used as a display but also designed to enhance learning activities groups by creating word wall media. The word wall aims to improve students' understanding of English vocabulary without having to always rely on the use of a dictionary or meaning words given by the teacher (Uspa, 2020).

According to Jackson and Narvaez (2013), in teaching vocabulary by using word wall media, there are steps of planning vocabulary in applying this learning media. First, teachers learn about familiar vocabulary (prior knowledge) and new vocabulary students know. Second, teachers and students should work together to determine which words should be posted on the wall (Ainy, 2015). Teachers can choose words that are easy to remember by using favorite words on certain themes (Amelia, 2022). Third, teachers determine vocabulary targets by standards. Fourth, the choice of vocabulary should be flexible and allow for additional words that arise during instruction. Fifth, teachers identify the vocabulary that has been determined. Last, teachers sketch a concept map to organize content and relate vocabulary.

In creating a word wall, there are also some steps in this learning media application. First, teachers prepare student worksheets corresponding to the sketches. Second, students assist

teachers in creating these words with various variations that will be more interesting for students (Farhan, 2018). Lastly, teachers can create a word wall before learning begins. Word wall is written in large black letters and use different background colors so students can differentiate them (Silalahi & Napitu, 2021).

In placing a word wall, there are also some stages. First, teachers arrange how to connect word wall sketches and student worksheets. Teachers can arrange the words alphabetically to make it easier for students to memorize them (Tamba et al., 2019). Teachers can group words into several categories (Farhan, 2018). Second, teachers place word wall frames in the classroom. Teachers can use a large sheet of paper or a special whiteboard as a base (Silalahi & Napitu, 2021). Third, a word wall is placed on a cupboard or classroom door, on a classroom wall, in a window, or hung from the ceiling with a wire. Teachers should place the words where each student can see them. The words are written in large black letters using a variety of backgrounds and colors to differentiate the vocabulary further (Ainy, 2015). Teachers can pair selected words with pictures or real objects. Last, students are allowed to participate in the construction process.

When using word wall in the classroom, there are various steps taken by teachers. First, teachers use word wall with students. Teachers plan and structure instruction around word walls. Second, teachers ask students to pay attention to word wall media on the class wall. Third, teachers ask students to listen and divide students into groups (Amelia, 2022). Fourth, teachers introduce vocabulary during teaching. Fifth, teachers provide enough practice so that the words can be read and spelled automatically and ensure that the words from the wall are always spelled correctly. Teachers and students can practice word walls daily using various activities such as matching words, associating words, and eliminating letters (Ainy, 2015). Teachers can use word walls in listening, speaking, reading, or writing (Farhan, 2018). Last, to support class management, students can add items as their teacher directs during discussions and explanations. Because students take part in building word walls, they are very proud and enthusiastic about conveying it to other students.

Lastly, in completing students' note sheet and shared word wall, several stages can be designed by teachers. First, word walls must be removed frequently so students can understand and see their relevance (Ainy, 2015). Second, teachers can add new words to the word wall needed, with five words per week. Students can also update the definitions of their learned wall words as they develop a deeper understanding (Silalahi & Napitu, 2021). Third, a word wall can display the spelling of the week's word on the wall. Save year-round spellings of words on the wall to help students memorize words (Farhan, 2018). Last, teachers can take photos of the completed word wall and give copies of the photos to students to stick in their notebooks. In addition, photos can help teachers remember how they set up walls and lighten the burden of planning year after year.

According to Irawati (2017), the advantages of using the word wall method are as follows. First, word wall can assist students in teaching important parts of words so that students can better understand vocabulary mastery. Second, word walls can improve vocabulary mastery and development, which is part of reading and writing, so students can read and write better. Therefore, students can consciously see the word wall during recess and class. Third, word walls can train students in English and communication by using language creatively and being more familiar with English. Students can learn to remember and spell words and see patterns and relationships in words. Fourth, teachers can make variations of word wall games using

the teacher's own words so that learning in class is not boring and the words can stay in the student's long-term memory. Sixth, teachers can choose vocabulary topics or forms so that students are expected to master vocabulary according to the teacher's target. Last, word walls can provide reference support for students during English learning and can be used as classroom decorations.

According to Irawati (2017), the disadvantages of using word wall are as follows: First, the process of creating the word wall media takes time to develop. Second, making word walls requires equipment because it requires paper, stationery, computers, printers, and boards. Last, creating a word wall using imagination and creativity to produce a good word wall.

Based on the aforementioned elaborations, a deeper investigation is needed to explore the senior secondary school teacher's practices and perceptions of using word wall in teaching vocabulary to their students. The findings of the study offer pedagogical implications for how EFL teachers design a more attractive teaching and learning media, especially for teaching vocabulary in similar educational contexts.

## Method

This study was designed with a qualitative case study approach. It focused on implementing word wall media by an English teacher as a vocabulary learning media at a private Islamic senior secondary school in Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia. An EFL teacher in this school was recruited to participate in this research. Data were garnered through semi-structured interviews with the English teacher, classroom observations, and documentation. The research data were made into a descriptive chronology, and a response was given as a conclusion.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the EFL teacher regarding the use of word wall media and their perceptions of the application of word wall media in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students. The interviews were conducted using Indonesian language to avoid misinterpretation and the interview sessions were done in 60 minutes for respective teacher. If the prepared questions did not provide the necessary information, additional questions were asked according to the teacher's responses and permission (Adams, 2015). This technique of adding information was adapted to the situation and conditions at school, so it was needed and accurate in collecting data from a study. All information obtained from the interview data was explained clearly and easily understood.

Classroom observation was carried out to dig up accurate and factual information about the use of word wall media in learning vocabulary in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students in the school setting. In this regard, it has been done by coming directly and observing the activities carried out in the classroom from October 11 to October 19, 2023. In this study, direct and non-participating observations were made in the classroom to obtain information about the learning process, student conditions, strategies, and other information that could assist the research. In this data collection, the observation was managed four times by providing an observation note.

Meanwhile, documentation was overtaken to support the data obtained from semi-structured interviews and observations. This study documented photos of activities, archives,

lesson plans, and word wall media used in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students. Further, triangulation was carried out as a data validation technique to collect data while examining the trustworthiness of the data to get accurate and precise conclusions. Documentation was also done simultaneously with observation.

The obtained data were analyzed using an interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014) consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data condensation, the researchers selected and transformed the data obtained in the semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and documentation. In the data display, the researchers organized information obtained from the data that allows conclusion drawing and action. Meanwhile, in the conclusion drawing and verification, the researchers interpreted the selected data that lead to decision of the study findings.

## Findings and discussion

### ***The application of word wall media in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students***

Based on semi-structured interviews with the English teacher, classroom observations, and documentation, there were five steps of using word wall media in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students. It included planning vocabulary, designing the word wall, placing the word wall, using the word wall, and practicing advanced use.

When planning the vocabulary list, the teacher found out the students' vocabulary by asking whether they previously studied English. Second, the teacher determined the vocabulary by looking at the vocabulary book. Third, the teacher determined ten vocabulary words and their meanings each week. The vocabulary came from the teacher and was provided before the word wall was designed. Finally, the teacher gave vocabulary before the lesson was finished. The teacher wrote English vocabularies and their meanings on the whiteboard. The results of the teacher's interviews also confirm this empirical evidence:

At the beginning of school, I explained word wall media to students. What is word wall media? How do you make it, and how do you use it? Then, I divided the students into several groups containing a maximum of 4 to 5 students. Usually, one class had 6 to 7 groups. Then, they were asked to inform me of the vocabulary they knew. Based on their updates, I can plan for what vocabulary for the Word Wall (Teacher, Semi-structure interview, October 27, 2023, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview excerpt, the teacher identified the students' vocabulary when planning vocabulary. In addition, the teacher could determine vocabulary by asking students about the vocabulary displayed, such as the words that would be pasted on the wall (Tamba et al., 2019). However, in this step, the teacher did not determine vocabulary by asking students; instead, the teacher planned vocabulary by looking at the vocabulary book.

Based on the results of the observations and interviews, during the process of designing the word wall, there were some sequences to follow. First, the word wall was designed by the students in groups consisting of four or five students. The students worked together to make it, so the word wall was more varied and exciting. However, in this case, the teacher did not help the students. Second, the students made a word wall using book paper according to the student's creativity. This part was based on the teacher's orders because the material was easy for students to obtain, and the cost was low. Third, the word wall was written in bold and colored letters according to student creativity. Lastly, the teacher did not help students

design word walls. However, the teacher only directed how to make a good and correct word wall. The teacher provided feedback to students who had designed the word walls. It could be used to evaluate the students' performance and make word walls well.

Moreover, in designing a word wall, this media was written in large, clear black letters using various background colors to differentiate confusing vocabulary (Silalahi & Napitu, 2021). Teachers could add color to the word wall to make it easier to differentiate vocabulary. However, in this case, the teacher did not use color coding on the word wall; instead, the teacher only used bold letters that were colored randomly. It indicates that the teacher did not focus on differentiating the vocabulary displayed.

Finally, the teacher made the words in various forms that would be more interesting to the students. To make it easy to see, the teacher wrote the vocabulary in large size (Irawati, 2017). The teacher could use a large sheet of paper or a special whiteboard as a base to make it easier to place.

For placing the word wall, based on the semi-structured interviews and observations, there were several stages to conduct. First, the teacher positioned the word wall on an easily visible wall. Second, the primary material used is styrofoam. Third, the teacher used pins as a hook. Fourth, the word wall was not placed on a real object. Fifth, the word wall was not placed sequentially or grouped by letters; instead, students placed word walls randomly. Lastly, the teacher did not help students place the word wall, but she directed them on how to put up the word wall properly and correctly.

**Figure 1**

*Positioning the Word Wall*



Figure 1 illustrates that a student was designing and placing a word wall on the given classroom setting. There was list of vocabularies written in the word wall. The essential things to pay attention to when placing word walls were the walls' location and the classroom's arrangement. This finding confirms that word walls were placed on walls that were easily visible to students from all directions (Ainy, 2015). It indicates that when students were active in class, they saw the word wall indirectly.

Informed by the semi-structured interviews and observations, this study also describes the next stage of how word wall is implemented; it was using the word wall. The first step in

using the word wall was when the teacher pronounced English vocabularies, then it was followed by the students. Second, the teacher explained the meaning and gave examples of short sentences from the word wall. Third, the teacher played a word-guessing game with the students. Finally, the teacher provided feedback on the word wall that was created. The teacher could also use a word wall as a game medium. The teacher gave the students some random letters on paper. Students arranged letters to form a word (Altayani, 2021). However, in this case, the teacher used a word-guessing game. Students were asked to guess the meaning of the selected words by shuffling.

The last step in applying the word wall was practicing the advanced use. It could be observed in several stages as follows. First, the teacher instructed all students to write ten vocabulary words in a notebook from the word wall created this week. Second, the word wall that had been created was displayed on the wall for a week. Third, the word wall was kept by students. Lastly, the teacher added a vocabulary guessing game.

Informed by the collected data in practicing the advanced use of the world wall, the teacher only added ten vocabulary words a week. The teacher could put up a word wall for a week to help students remember vocabulary without memorizing it (Silalahi & Napitu, 2021). After a week of the display, the word wall was removed and replaced with new vocabulary so students could understand and see its relevance (Ainy, 2015).

The teacher could take photos of the completed word wall and give students copies of the photos to stick in their notebooks. However, in this case, the teacher did not take a photo of the word wall but instead instructed the students to save the word wall that had been installed. In this case, the teacher gave questions to students by asking the meaning of randomly selected vocabulary.

### ***Benefits and challenges of using word wall media in teaching vocabulary***

Based on the semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and documentation, this study also describes several benefits and challenges of using word wall in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school EFL students. Concerning the practical benefits of applying this learning media, this study elaborates empirical findings as follows:

First, the junior secondary school EFL teacher shared her perceptions that the word wall media could help her students familiarize with English vocabularies.

I think using word wall media could familiarize the students with vocabulary, and it was more interesting than just memorizing each vocabulary word every day. Sometimes, the students got bored with memorizing vocabulary, and it was not recommended to memorize vocabulary, but students were asked to understand every sentence the teacher gave (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Based on the interview vignette, the teacher believed that her students could understand vocabulary by using a word wall. Word walls contained several vocabulary words that explained their meaning and gave examples. Word walls were also an interesting medium for learning vocabulary because the students were not burdened with memorizing vocabulary. However, students should understand every English sentence.

Second, the use of word wall media also motivated the students to enrich their English vocabulary acquisition.

Because the students have familiarized with English vocabularies, the students were more motivated to increase their vocabulary mastery when applying the word wall media in their classrooms (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview data, the EFL teacher reported that the word wall could motivate students to learn vocabulary since the teacher used this learning media in several meetings so that the students were familiar with the vocabulary, indicating more enthusiasm in enriching their English vocabularies (Khasanah & Burhan, 2022).

This practical finding was also observed when the teacher practiced pronouncing and explain how to use the vocabularies for daily uses as in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Practicing Pronunciation through the Word Wall*



Figure 2 depicts that the EFL teacher practiced how to pronounce and use some vocabularies for daily uses when using the word wall media to teaching the junior secondary school students. This activity aimed to help the students use the vocabularies appropriately.

Third, another finding also shows that the use of word wall media assisted the students to read English passages and write sentences in English. This is evidenced by following interview excerpts:

That's true that the students get benefits when using the word wall to improve their vocabulary. One of them is this learning media are useful in helping them read and write English texts (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Portrayed by the interview data, the EFL teacher declared that the word wall media could help students read and write English texts. Based on the classroom observation, when using the word wall, the teacher also pronounced vocabulary together with her students and gave them assignments to rewrite the vocabulary in their notebooks to enrich the students' vocabulary.

Next, the application of word wall also helped students to communicate in English. The EFL teacher explained:

When using word wall, I asked my students to describe an object. They tried to communicate in English to illustrate how the object looks like (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).



Based on the interview vignettes, the teacher stated that the word wall could help the students communicate in English. The students could check the vocabulary they wrote on the word wall or in their notebook. This activity implies that the students also practiced speaking in English when they used the word wall in enriching vocabularies.

Further, the use of word wall also benefited the EFL teacher to teach English vocabularies to junior secondary school students. An empirical finding demonstrated that the teacher designed vocabulary teaching and learning that suited the students' language target. This is evidenced in the following interview vignettes:

I often provide the students with list of English vocabularies every week. It consists of 20 new vocabularies. This can enrich their vocabularies to be applied in daily uses (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Based on the interview results, the teacher could determine the target vocabulary. The teacher provided 20 new vocabulary words in a week. Thus, in one month, the teacher could add a minimum of 80 vocabulary words. The teacher could add five words per week to the word wall. If this is insufficient, the teacher could add 10 to 20 new vocabulary words (Silalahi & Napitu, 2021). However, in this case, the teacher added new vocabulary in the word wall, only 10 new vocabulary words, and the teacher added 10 new vocabulary words in notebooks apart from the vocabulary on the word wall. Thus, in one week, the teacher added 20 new vocabulary words.

The EFL teacher also reported that the use of word wall could help her manage the class in a more engaged way as follows:

When I use the world wall, I practice how to pronounce English vocabularies and ask them to repeat. This activity can organize the students to receive more vocabularies (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Portrayed by the interview data, the word wall could help the teacher manage the class in teaching vocabulary. The teacher used a word wall by pronouncing vocabulary, which all students followed. The teacher repeated the pronunciation of the vocabulary until all students were correct.

Conversely, the EFL teacher also faced several challenges in the application of word wall to teach vocabularies to junior secondary school students. Student teamwork emerged as the first challenge as evidenced in the following data:

... cooperation in using word wall is very essential so that I divide my class into some groups (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Based on the interview results above, the EFL teacher shared that the word wall required good teamwork among students. In designing the word wall, the teacher made groups of students to work together. This finding shows that a good student teamwork is very crucial to make the word wall well-designed.

The next challenge the junior high school teacher encountered is consistency in application. She reported:

Yes, it requires consistency because it is frequently done in several meetings for a whole year (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Informed by the interview data, the teacher pointed out that the word wall was a long-term medium that needed consistency in application. This finding is in line with Irawati's (2017) study, reporting that word wall took a long time for students to understand many vocabulary words. When it was inconsistent, students did not get maximum results, meaning they did not get many additional new vocabulary words (Wardana, 2023).

Practicality of the learning media was also regarded as a challenge by the EFL teacher when using the word wall to teach vocabulary to the junior secondary school students. It is shared in the following interview data:

Word wall need some utensils, such as paper, color markers, pins, hooks, and so on. Sometimes, it is not easy enough to prepare them (Teacher, Semi-structured interview, October 30, 2023, Researcher translation).

Depicted by the interview vignettes, the EFL teacher stated that the word wall required some materials and utensils to produce, including paper, color markers, pins, and hooks. When the teacher cannot determine the practicality of materials and utensils, the learning media will not be efficient (Farhan, 2018).

## Conclusion

The current investigation identified five steps of using word wall media in teaching vocabulary to junior secondary school students. It involves planning vocabulary, designing the word wall, placing the word wall, using the word wall, and practicing advanced use. The implications of this finding reveal that EFL teachers should design how to use the word media in a sequenced way so that students are able to enrich their English vocabularies through the application of this learning media.

Another finding also demonstrates that the word wall media are very promising to help secondary school students familiarize with vocabulary, motivate them to elevate vocabulary acquisition, encourage them in reading and writing, and foster them to communicate in English. The application of word wall also benefited the EFL teacher to design vocabulary teaching and learning that suited the students' language target and manage the class in a more engaged way. Nevertheless, the use of word wall may cause some challenges by EFL teachers, including student teamwork, consistency in application, and practicality of the learning media. This finding indicates that EFL teachers should maximize the application of word wall to assist their students enrich vocabulary acquisition for their daily uses.

This qualitative research involved the participation of an EFL teacher, providing significant and valuable insights. Nevertheless, the findings do not possess the capacity to generalize the practices, benefits, and challenges investigated in this study. Consequently, these findings may not accurately depict the comprehensive reports within vocabulary classes. In response to these identified limitations, further studies are recommended to recruit more research participants and explore more diverse learning media to teach vocabulary, specifically for secondary school students.

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