The Implementation of Explicit Instruction with Hyponymy Game in Teaching Vocabulary

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Abstract
The objective of this research was to determine whether the implementation of explicit instruction combined with the hyponymy game has an impact on students' vocabulary at the eighth grade of SMPN I Aitinyo. This study applied a pre-experimental quantitative research design using a one-group pretest–posttest design. The sample consisted of 20 eighth-grade students in one class. Data were collected using a vocabulary test consisting of 20 items (15 multiple choice and 5 matching items). The data were analyzed using SPSS 31. The findings showed that the P-value (0.001) was lower than 0.05, meaning that H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. This indicates that there was a significant impact of teaching vocabulary using explicit instruction combined with the hyponymy game between the pretest and posttest. The mean score increased from 49.25 in the pretest to 71.5 in the posttest. The results imply that explicit instruction supports clear word understanding, while the hyponymy game makes learning more engaging. This study suggests that creative approaches can enhance vocabulary teaching. However, this research has several limitations: it involved only one class without a comparison group, focused only on noun vocabulary, and observed students only during classroom activities without examining learning outside the classroom.
Keywords: Vocabulary; Explicit Instruction; Hyponymy Game

Introduction

Vocabulary is widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of language proficiency because it supports learners' ability to listen, speak, read, and write effectively. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), vocabulary knowledge functions as the basic resource that enables students to comprehend input and produce meaningful communication. Apriliah (2015) emphasizes that vocabulary constitutes a large portion of the foundation for students' language development. Learners who possess limited vocabulary often struggle to understand texts, participate in conversations, and express their ideas accurately. For junior high school students who are still building their English foundation, vocabulary mastery becomes a critical prerequisite for successful language learning.

Despite its importance, vocabulary learning remains a persistent challenge for many EFL students. Widiyaningsih and Hadi (2021) report that insufficient vocabulary knowledge frequently prevents learners from communicating effectively. In many Indonesian classrooms, vocabulary instruction still relies heavily on memorization and teacher explanation, which may not provide sufficient opportunities for meaningful practice. As a result, students often forget newly learned words and show low retention over time. This condition suggests the need for instructional approaches that not only present vocabulary clearly but also help students organize and use new words in meaningful ways.

Preliminary observation conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Aitinyo revealed that eighth-grade students experienced several difficulties related to vocabulary mastery. First, many students quickly forgot the vocabulary they had learned because they felt overwhelmed by the large number of new words introduced in each lesson. Second, some students had very limited exposure to English during their primary school years, which resulted in weak vocabulary foundations when entering junior high school. Third, although a few students demonstrated moderate vocabulary knowledge, their mastery was inconsistent and often inaccurate. Finally, many students perceived English as a difficult subject, which reduced their motivation and participation during vocabulary learning activities. These classroom

realities indicate that conventional vocabulary teaching strategies have not fully addressed students' learning needs.

To respond to these challenges, teachers need instructional approaches that are both systematic and engaging. One approach that has received considerable attention is explicit instruction. Explicit instruction is characterized by clear explanation, step-by-step modeling, guided practice, and immediate corrective feedback. Sahade and Amsa (2020) argue that explicit instruction helps students understand learning material more clearly because the teacher provides structured guidance throughout the lesson. In vocabulary learning, this approach is particularly beneficial because it reduces ambiguity and supports gradual knowledge construction. When students receive clear demonstrations and guided practice, they are more likely to understand word meanings and usage accurately.

However, structured explanation alone may not be sufficient to sustain students' motivation and active involvement. Vocabulary learning also requires meaningful practice that enables learners to organize words conceptually and use them in context. Hadley et al. (2019) highlight the importance of building semantic networks by grouping related words. One instructional strategy that supports this process is the hyponymy game. Hyponymy refers to the semantic relationship between general and specific words, such as the relationship between "animal" and "cat" or "vehicle" and "bus." Through hyponymy-based activities, students learn to classify vocabulary into meaningful categories, which can strengthen memory retention and conceptual understanding. In addition, the game format creates an interactive classroom atmosphere that can increase students' enthusiasm and participation.

Previous empirical studies have demonstrated the potential of hyponymy games in improving vocabulary learning. Apriadi (2024), for instance, reported significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after implementing hyponymy-based activities in an experimental classroom. Similarly, other studies have shown that game-based vocabulary learning can enhance motivation and engagement among junior high school students. On the other hand, research on explicit instruction has also consistently shown positive effects on vocabulary acquisition due to its structured and guided nature. Nevertheless, most previous studies have examined these two approaches separately.

A careful review of the literature indicates that empirical research integrating explicit instruction with a hyponymy game within a single instructional framework remains limited, particularly in Indonesian junior high school contexts. This gap is pedagogically important. Explicit instruction may provide strong cognitive scaffolding that helps students understand vocabulary systematically, while the hyponymy game may supply the interactive practice needed to reinforce semantic relationships and sustain learner motivation. Investigating the combined implementation of these two approaches may therefore provide more comprehensive support for vocabulary development than using either strategy alone. Based on this rationale, the present study focuses on examining the impact of implementing explicit instruction combined with a hyponymy game on the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Aitinyo. By addressing both instructional clarity and student engagement, this study is expected to contribute practical insights for EFL teachers, particularly in contexts where students demonstrate low vocabulary achievement and limited exposure to English.

Literature Review

a. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is widely regarded as a core component of language learning because it represents the body of words that learners must know and use in communication. In the context of English as a foreign language, vocabulary supports learners' ability to understand and produce language across the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Widiyaningsih and Hadi (2021) define vocabulary as a list of words along with their meanings that learners need to master when learning a foreign language. Similarly, other scholars emphasize that vocabulary knowledge includes not only word meaning but also appropriate usage in context.

Vocabulary mastery is essential for effective communication. Learners with limited vocabulary often struggle to express ideas and comprehend messages. Previous studies highlight that vocabulary serves as the foundation for language proficiency and that insufficient vocabulary knowledge can hinder overall language development. Therefore, vocabulary instruction remains a central focus in English language teaching, especially at the junior high school level.

Vocabulary can be classified into several word classes. Thornbury (as cited in Apriliah, 2015) identifies eight major categories: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and determiners. However, many classroom-based vocabulary studies focus on nouns because they are concrete and easier for beginner learners to acquire. In this study, the researcher concentrates on noun vocabulary, particularly in the themes of animals, foods, places, and tools, as these categories are commonly introduced at the junior high school level.

b. Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction is a structured teaching approach in which the teacher provides clear explanations, step-by-step modeling, guided practice, and immediate feedback. Sahade and Amsa (2020) describe explicit instruction as a learning model where lessons are directly guided by the teacher to ensure that students clearly understand the material. This approach is particularly useful for vocabulary learning because it reduces ambiguity and supports systematic knowledge building. Research indicates that explicit instruction can significantly improve vocabulary acquisition. Baker (as cited in Masrul & Wicaksono, 2023) notes that explicit teaching provides detailed guidance that helps students learn vocabulary more deeply. In addition, Vaughn and Fletcher (2021) explain that explicit instruction is learner-centered because it adapts the level of support based on students' learning difficulties. Through clear modeling and guided practice, students can develop confidence and accuracy in using new words.

Hughes et al. (2019) outline key elements of explicit instruction, including focusing on critical content, sequencing material logically, breaking complex concepts into manageable parts, using clear language, providing guided practice, and delivering prompt feedback. These elements ensure that learning occurs in an organized and supportive environment. Because vocabulary learning often requires repetition and clarity, explicit instruction is considered appropriate for improving students' word mastery.

c. Hyponymy

Hyponymy is a semantic relationship between words in which the meaning of one word is included within the meaning of another. In simple terms, a hyponym represents a more specific member of a general category. Patahuddin et al. (2020) explain that hyponymy is part of semantic relations that help convey meaning beyond synonymy and antonymy. For example, rose and jasmine are hyponyms of flower, while carrot and cabbage are hyponyms of vegetable. Understanding hyponymy helps learners organize vocabulary into meaningful categories. Harmer (as cited in Alfian, 2017) notes that recognizing hierarchical word relationships enables students to build stronger semantic networks. When learners see how specific words relate to general concepts, they are more likely to remember and correctly use the vocabulary. In classroom practice, hyponymy can be taught through interactive activities such as word-grouping games. Shelley (as cited in Rini, 2015) proposes a simple procedure: the teacher provides categories, students list as many related words as possible, and learners expand the list collaboratively. Such activities encourage active participation and reinforce semantic connections among words.

d. The Use of Hyponymy Games in Vocabulary Teaching

Game-based learning has been shown to increase student engagement and motivation. Hyponymy games, in particular, help students understand relationships between general and specific words while making vocabulary learning more enjoyable. Herdayani (2019) reports that hyponymy games can increase students' enthusiasm and reduce teacher-centered explanations. However, the approach may also create classroom noise and requires good classroom management. Previous empirical studies support the effectiveness of hyponymy games. Hardianti (2018) found significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after using hyponymy-based activities. Similarly, Widiyaningsih and Hadi (2021) reported that hyponymy games enriched junior high school students' English vocabulary. These findings suggest that semantic grouping through games can support vocabulary retention.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental design. Select the quantitative method because the study aims to measure the effect of explicit instruction combined with a hyponymy game on students' vocabulary achievement using numerical data. Apply a one-group pretest–posttest design to compare students' vocabulary performance before and after the treatment. Use this design to obtain preliminary evidence of the instructional impact, although acknowledge its limited control over external variables.

Conduct the study at SMP Negeri 1 Aitinyo. Define the population as all eighth-grade students. Select the sample purposively by choosing one class that demonstrates relatively low vocabulary mastery and is accessible for treatment. Include 20 students in the sample. Choose purposive sampling because the participants meet the research objective and classroom conditions allow consistent implementation of the intervention. Use a vocabulary test as the main research instrument. Construct the test to measure students' noun vocabulary related to animals, foods, places, and tools. Design the instrument with 20 items consisting of 15 multiple-choice questions and 5 matching items. Administer the test in two stages: pre-test and post-test. Conduct the pre-test in the first meeting to measure students' initial vocabulary mastery. Administer the post-test in the final meeting after the treatment to determine students' improvement.

Establish content validity of the instrument through expert judgment. Ask two English education experts to review the test items in terms of relevance, clarity, and alignment with the learning objectives. Revise the items based on their feedback before administering the test. Calculate the reliability of the instrument using the KR-20 formula because the items are objective. Interpret the reliability coefficient using standard criteria to ensure the test demonstrates acceptable internal consistency. Implement the treatment across six meetings. Conduct the pre-test in the first meeting and the post-test in the sixth meeting. Use the four middle meetings for instructional treatment. Structure each treatment session following the phases of explicit instruction integrated with the hyponymy game, as described below.

In the orientation phase, state the learning objectives and activate students' prior knowledge about the target vocabulary. In the modeling phase, present new vocabulary explicitly, explain meanings clearly, and demonstrate how words are grouped into hyponymy categories using examples. In the guided practice phase, involve students in completing hyponymy grouping tasks with teacher support and immediate feedback. In the game phase, conduct the hyponymy game in small groups where students classify words into correct categories competitively. In the independent practice phase, ask students to complete short vocabulary exercises individually to reinforce learning. In the closure phase, review key vocabulary and provide corrective feedback.

Analyze the data using SPSS version 31. Begin with descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to summarize students' scores. Conduct the Shapiro–Wilk test to examine data normality because the sample size is fewer than 50. Proceed with a paired sample t-test to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Set the significance level at 0.05. Calculate Cohen's d to determine the effect size and interpret the magnitude of the treatment effect. Maintain research ethics throughout the study. Obtain permission from the school before conducting the research. Inform students that the test is for research purposes and ensure confidentiality of their scores. Use the collected data only for academic analysis.

Result

This section presents the findings after the data were analyzed. The analysis includes students' vocabulary achievement in the pre-test and post-test, the normality test, descriptive statistics, and the paired sample t-test to determine the significance of the treatment effect. The study was conducted in six meetings. In the first meeting, students completed a pre-test to measure their initial vocabulary mastery. The following four meetings were devoted to treatment using explicit instruction combined with a hyponymy game across different noun topics. In the sixth meeting, students took the post-test to measure their vocabulary achievement after the treatment.

Students' Vocabulary Achievement

Table 1. *Students' Vocabulary Classification in Pre-test and Post-test*

No	Classification	Range	Pre-test (F)	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (F)	Post-test (%)
1	Very Good	90–100	0	0%	2	10%
2	Good	70–89	2	10%	12	60%
3	Fair	50–69	9	45%	6	30%
4	Poor	30–49	7	35%	0	0%
5	Very Poor	10–29	2	10%	0	0%
Total			**20**	**100%**	**20**	**100%**

As shown in Table 1, students' vocabulary performance improved after the treatment. In the pre-test, most students were in the fair and poor categories, and none reached the very good level. After the treatment, the distribution shifted positively: 2 students (10%) achieved very good, 12 students (60%) achieved good, and no students remained in the poor or very poor categories. This indicates substantial improvement in vocabulary mastery.

Normality Test

Before testing the hypothesis, the normality of the data was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test because the sample size was fewer than 50. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Normality Test (Shapiro–Wilk)*

Test	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test	0.977	20	0.894
Post-test	0.932	20	0.167

Table 2 shows that the significance value of the pre-test (0.894) and post-test (0.167) are both greater than 0.05. Therefore, the data are normally distributed, and parametric analysis using the paired sample t-test is appropriate.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. *Mean Score and Standard Deviation*

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	20	49.25	15.15	3.39
Post-test	20	71.50	11.48	2.57

Table 3 presents the mean score and standard deviation of students' vocabulary achievement. Based on Table 3, the mean score increased from 49.25 in the pre-test to 71.50 in the post-test. This indicates that students performed better after receiving the treatment. The lower standard deviation in the post-test also suggests more consistent performance among students.

Hypothesis Testing

To determine whether the improvement was statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Paired Sample t-Test*

Pair	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)

Pre – Post	-22.25	6.38	1.43	15.593	19	0.001

Table 4 shows that the t-value (15.593) is higher than the t-table value (2.093), and the significance value (0.001) is lower than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. This means that the implementation of explicit instruction combined with the hyponymy game had a significant impact on students' vocabulary mastery. The findings demonstrate a significant improvement in students' vocabulary after the treatment. The increase in the mean score from 49.25 to 71.50, supported by the significant t-test result, confirms that explicit instruction combined with the hyponymy game was effective in enhancing the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMPN I Aitinyo. Interpret this effect size as very large**,** indicating that the treatment has a strong practical impact on students' vocabulary achievement. The statistical evidence consistently demonstrates improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of explicit instruction combined with the hyponymy game. The positive shift in score distribution, the moderate normalized gain (0.44), the significant paired t-test result ($p < 0.05$), and the very large effect size collectively confirm the effectiveness of the instructional intervention for eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Aitinyo.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of explicit instruction combined with a hyponymy game significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery. This conclusion is supported by several pieces of statistical evidence, including the increase in the mean score from 49.25 in the pre-test to 71.50 in the post-test, the moderate normalized gain (0.44), and the very large effect size. These results indicate that the instructional intervention was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful for eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Aitinyo.

One important interpretation of the findings relates to the role of structured instructional support. The improvement in students' vocabulary performance suggests that explicit instruction successfully provided the cognitive scaffolding needed by learners with limited vocabulary background. The step-by-step modeling, guided practice, and immediate feedback appeared to reduce students' confusion when learning new words. This outcome aligns with the view of Sahade and Amsa (2020), who argue that explicit instruction enhances learning clarity by breaking complex material into manageable steps. In the present study, many students who initially struggled with word recognition were able to correctly identify and classify vocabulary after repeated guided practice. This indicates that explicit instruction helped stabilize students' foundational vocabulary knowledge.

Beyond clarity of explanation, the interactive element of the hyponymy game appears to have played a crucial role in strengthening vocabulary retention. Vocabulary learning is not only a matter of memorizing isolated words but also of building semantic networks that connect related concepts. Hadley et al. (2019) emphasize that grouping words into meaningful categories supports deeper vocabulary processing. In this study, students demonstrated increasing accuracy in classifying words under appropriate categories such as animals, tools, and foods. The hyponymy activities encouraged students to think about hierarchical relationships between general and specific terms, which likely supported stronger memory encoding. This finding reinforces Harmer's view that semantic relationship awareness improves vocabulary retention.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research on hyponymy-based vocabulary instruction. Apriadi (2024) reported significant vocabulary gains among junior high school students using hyponymy games. Similarly, Hardianti (2018) found that semantic grouping activities increased students' vocabulary mastery and classroom engagement. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that the effectiveness of hyponymy activities can be further strengthened when combined with explicit instructional guidance. While earlier studies primarily emphasized the game element, the current results suggest that structured teacher support and interactive semantic practice function most effectively when integrated.

Another notable finding concerns students' classroom engagement. During the treatment sessions, students became more active in asking questions, classifying vocabulary, and participating in

group activities. This behavioral change indicates that the combination of explicit instruction and game-based learning addressed both cognitive and motivational dimensions of vocabulary learning. Vaughn and Fletcher (2021) note that explicit instruction can increase learner confidence when students clearly understand task expectations. At the same time, the competitive and collaborative nature of the hyponymy game likely enhanced students' interest and reduced the monotony often associated with vocabulary memorization. The observed increase in participation supports the argument that effective vocabulary instruction should balance structure and interaction.

From a theoretical perspective, the success of the combined approach can be explained through the complementary functions of the two strategies. Explicit instruction primarily supports cognitive clarity by organizing input and reducing ambiguity. In contrast, the hyponymy game promotes active processing by requiring students to manipulate vocabulary within semantic categories. When used together, these approaches appear to support both the initial acquisition and the consolidation of vocabulary knowledge. This synergy may explain the very large effect size observed in the study. The finding suggests that vocabulary learning benefits from instructional designs that integrate teacher guidance with meaningful learner engagement rather than relying on a single technique.

Despite the positive outcomes, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study employed a pre-experimental one-group design without a control group. This design limits the ability to attribute the observed improvement solely to the treatment because other factors, such as repeated testing or increased familiarity with the material, may have influenced the results. Future studies should use true experimental or quasi-experimental designs to strengthen causal claims. Second, the sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single class, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations. Third, the study focused only on noun vocabulary. The effectiveness of the combined approach for other word classes, such as verbs or adjectives, remains uncertain. Finally, the study measured short-term vocabulary gains and did not examine long-term retention outside the classroom context.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the findings suggest that English teachers, particularly at the junior high school level, should consider integrating explicit instruction with semantic-based games when teaching vocabulary. Teachers working in contexts where students have limited English exposure may benefit from providing clear modeling before introducing interactive practice. However, teachers must also manage classroom time and group dynamics carefully to ensure that game activities remain focused on learning objectives.

The discussion confirms that explicit instruction combined with a hyponymy game represents a promising strategy for improving vocabulary mastery among EFL learners. The approach addresses both the need for structured guidance and the importance of active engagement in vocabulary learning. Future research involving larger samples, control groups, and different vocabulary types is necessary to further validate and extend these findings.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of implementing explicit instruction combined with a hyponymy game on the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMPN I Aitinyo. Based on the results of the pre-experimental study, the findings indicate that the instructional intervention significantly improved students' vocabulary achievement. The statistical analysis showed a clear increase in students' performance. The mean score improved from 49.25 in the pre-test to 71.50 in the post-test. Furthermore, the paired sample t-test revealed a significance value of 0.001, which is lower than 0.05. This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, confirming that the implementation of explicit instruction combined with the hyponymy game had a significant positive impact on students' vocabulary mastery.

In addition to the quantitative improvement, classroom observations indicated that students became more active, engaged, and confident during vocabulary learning activities. The structured nature of explicit instruction helped students understand word meanings clearly, while the hyponymy game provided meaningful and enjoyable practice in recognizing relationships between words. The integration of these two approaches made vocabulary learning more organized and interactive. In conclusion, explicit instruction combined with a hyponymy game can be considered an effective strategy for improving vocabulary mastery among junior high school students. This approach not only

enhances students' vocabulary achievement but also supports their engagement in the learning process. Future studies are encouraged to involve larger samples, include comparison groups, and examine other types of vocabulary to further validate and extend these findings.

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