

## ENHANCING VOCABULARY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH GROUP LEARNING AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL EFL LEARNER

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*Submit*, 25-05-2025

*Accepted*, 28-05-2025

*Publish*, 30-05-2025

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of group learning on vocabulary acquisition and English academic performance among sixth-grade primary school students. The method used is a mixed-method approach, combining a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-tests comparing an experimental group (n = 30) receiving structured group-based instruction and a control group (n = 30) receiving traditional teaching, supplemented by qualitative data from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The results show that the experimental group achieved statistically significant improvements in vocabulary retention and English performance scores, with thematic analysis revealing peer support, motivation, active participation, and confidence-building as key mechanisms. In conclusion, group learning enhances lexical retention and fosters a supportive, motivational environment, yielding disproportionate benefits for low-performing and introverted students and offering implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and inclusive language pedagogy.

**Keywords:** *English Performance, Group Learning, Motivation, Primary School, Vocabulary Acquisition.*

### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition stands at the core of second language learning and significantly influences learners' ability to comprehend texts, express ideas, and interact effectively in the target language (Nation in Lutfiyah et al., 2022). Mastery of vocabulary is fundamental not only for linguistic competence but also for overall academic performance, particularly in subjects where English serves as the medium of instruction (Çelik & Baran, 2022). Among the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, vocabulary serves as a bridge that enables learners to utilize these skills meaningfully. Without an adequate vocabulary base, learners

face difficulties in comprehending reading materials, constructing coherent written texts, or engaging in oral communication (Nontasee & Sukying, 2021). Therefore, vocabulary learning must be approached with strategic, pedagogically informed interventions that align with the cognitive and social development of learners, particularly those in primary education settings.

The urgency of developing vocabulary knowledge in young learners is further intensified by the demands of modern education systems, which expect students to process increasingly complex academic content in English from an early age (Zucker et al., 2021). In multilingual countries like Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, vocabulary acquisition plays a crucial role in determining students' readiness for secondary-level education. Research shows that vocabulary size correlates positively with academic achievement in various disciplines, not limited to language-related subjects (Alsahafi, 2023). This means that vocabulary proficiency does not merely contribute to language development but serves as a predictor of students' broader educational success.

Despite the recognized importance of vocabulary learning, its instruction in primary classrooms often faces significant challenges. Teachers frequently rely on rote memorization and isolated word lists without contextual or meaningful engagement, which undermines long-term retention and applicability (Ganesan et al., 2025). Moreover, elementary students, who are still in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development (Dian et al., 2023), benefit more from interactive, multisensory, and social learning experiences rather than passive learning formats. Consequently, traditional vocabulary teaching methods fail to address the developmental needs of this age group. These limitations necessitate the exploration of more effective pedagogical strategies such as group-based learning, which capitalizes on peer interaction and social scaffolding to reinforce vocabulary use in authentic contexts.

The theoretical foundation for exploring group learning in vocabulary acquisition is strongly supported by Sociocultural Theory, primarily proposed by Lev Vygotsky. (Vygotsky in Lasmawan & Budiarta, 2020) emphasized the centrality of social interaction in cognitive development, introducing the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that learners can achieve higher levels of understanding with the guidance and collaboration of more capable peers or adults. Within this framework, vocabulary learning is no longer viewed as an individual endeavour but as a socially mediated process wherein learners co-construct meaning through dialogue and joint activity (Shafiai et al., 2024). Thus, group learning environments offer opportunities for learners to articulate their thoughts, negotiate meanings, and receive feedback, which are crucial mechanisms in vocabulary development.

In parallel, Constructivist Theory (Romdhon et al., 2024) underscores the learner's active role in constructing knowledge through experience and reflection. From this perspective, vocabulary is not merely transmitted from teacher to student but emerges through engagement in meaningful tasks that require learners to relate new words to existing cognitive schemas. Group activities facilitate this process by exposing learners to diverse perspectives and contexts, enabling them to refine and deepen their understanding of vocabulary items (Ariffin, 2021). Constructivism also supports the integration of vocabulary learning into real-life or simulated scenarios, encouraging students to use language functionally rather than merely memorizing definitions.

Additionally, Collaborative Learning Theory contributes a pedagogical dimension by emphasizing shared responsibility, interdependence, and collective problem-solving as catalysts for learning (Dinjanglu Pheiga Gangmei & GD, 2024). Collaborative learning environments, especially in the form of small-group discussions or project-based tasks, foster a sense of community and accountability among learners, enhancing motivation and engagement. In vocabulary learning, collaboration allows students to encounter new words in meaningful interactions, ask clarifying questions, and learn from each other's linguistic resources (Ariffin, 2021). These practices not only facilitate vocabulary retention but also contribute to broader language competencies, such as fluency and pragmatic awareness.

Despite these theoretical and practical potentials, there remains a significant gap in empirical research examining the quantitative impact of group learning strategies on vocabulary memorization and English academic performance among primary school students. Existing studies on vocabulary instruction often focus on older learners or adopt descriptive qualitative designs that explore learners' perceptions or teaching practices (Ayana et al., 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights, they lack the rigor of experimental or quasi-experimental methodologies that can establish causality between group learning interventions and measurable vocabulary gains. Furthermore, the few available studies that adopt quantitative approaches often do not control for confounding variables such as students' prior vocabulary knowledge, motivation, or group dynamics, thereby limiting the generalizability of their findings (Genç Ersoy & Belet Boyacı, 2021).

Another notable gap in the literature is the underrepresentation of research in non-Western educational contexts, particularly in Southeast Asia. Cultural norms, classroom practices, and linguistic diversity in countries like Indonesia present unique conditions that may influence the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies. Therefore, studies grounded in these local contexts are needed to inform context-sensitive teaching practices and curricular reforms (Yang & Sanchez, 2023). Moreover, few studies have investigated how group learning not only aids vocabulary memorization but also correlates with broader academic

performance indicators in English, such as test scores, reading comprehension, or writing assessments.

In light of these gaps, the current study aims to critically examine the effectiveness of group learning on vocabulary memorization and academic performance in English among Grade 6 students in primary schools. Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions: 1) To what extent does group learning improve vocabulary retention compared to individual learning in primary school students? 2) How does participation in group learning activities influence students' academic performance in English, as measured by formal assessments? 3) What are the students' perceptions of group learning in relation to their motivation, engagement, and confidence in English vocabulary learning?

By addressing these questions, the research intends to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it integrates insights from sociocultural, constructivist, and collaborative learning perspectives to frame vocabulary acquisition as a socially constructed process. Practically, it offers empirical evidence on how group learning can be utilized as an effective strategy in vocabulary instruction, particularly in the context of early language education. The findings are expected to inform teacher training, curriculum development, and policy-making aimed at enhancing language instruction in primary education settings.

Given the identified gaps and challenges, the urgency of this study is grounded in the critical role that vocabulary acquisition plays in second language learning and overall academic achievement, particularly in primary education contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. Although vocabulary learning is essential, instruction at the elementary level often remains dominated by rote memorization and isolated word lists, which do not foster meaningful engagement or long-term retention. Moreover, the cognitive and social developmental needs of young learners call for interactive and socially mediated learning approaches, which traditional methods frequently fail to address. This urgency is further amplified by the scarcity of rigorous empirical research employing quantitative methods to evaluate the effectiveness of group learning strategies on vocabulary acquisition among primary school students, especially within Southeast Asian contexts such as Indonesia, where linguistic and cultural factors uniquely shape the learning environment.

This study aims to fill these gaps by focusing on sixth-grade primary school students in Indonesia, a population that is relatively underrepresented in the literature on collaborative vocabulary learning. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research integrates quasi-experimental quantitative data with qualitative insights from focus group discussions and interviews, thus providing a more holistic understanding of both the measurable outcomes and learners' perceptions. The

study is also distinguished by its application of well-established theoretical frameworks Sociocultural Theory and Cooperative Learning Theory within a localized educational context, thereby offering pedagogically relevant evidence to inform curriculum development and teacher training programs. Furthermore, the investigation explores how group learning differentially benefits students across various proficiency levels and social dispositions, contributing to the broader discourse on inclusive and adaptive teaching strategies in primary language education.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Understanding vocabulary as a component of language acquisition demands more than a lexical list or memorized terms. Vocabulary comprises not only individual words but also multi-word units, collocations, and nuanced meanings shaped by context (Nation in Lutfiyah et al., 2022). Nation proposed that vocabulary knowledge encompasses both form (pronunciation and spelling), meaning (conceptual and referential), and use (grammatical functions and collocational patterns), highlighting that vocabulary is not learned in isolation but in connection with real use. Similarly, (Aliakbari et al., 2024) emphasized that vocabulary acquisition is a gradual, multi-dimensional process. Learners develop receptive and productive knowledge through repeated exposure and strategic engagement. He argues that while learners can recognize words in listening or reading (receptive), they may not be able to produce them correctly (productive), reinforcing the necessity of pedagogical strategies that target both domains.

Vocabulary knowledge is central to all aspects of language competence. It influences learners' ability to comprehend spoken discourse, formulate coherent written texts, and participate in oral communication (Nation in Lutfiyah et al., 2022). Studies in second language acquisition consistently affirm that a large and functional vocabulary size correlates strongly with reading comprehension, listening ability, speaking fluency, and grammatical accuracy in writing (Nation in Lutfiyah et al., 2022). In essence, vocabulary functions as the linguistic currency that facilitates the exchange of meaning across all language skills. Beyond individual word knowledge, vocabulary learning must be contextualized within interactive and socially meaningful settings. This approach finds theoretical grounding in group learning and collaborative pedagogy, which facilitate both cognitive processing and emotional engagement in language tasks. Studies have shown that group learning environments, such as those facilitated by microteaching programs, enhance reflective thinking and allow for meaningful peer interactions, which are crucial for vocabulary acquisition (Ambarini et al., 2022).

### **Group Learning and Collaborative Pedagogy**

Group learning, as conceptualized by (Shimizu et al., 2022), is grounded in the theory of social interdependence, which posits that positive interdependence among group members leads to higher individual achievement. Their framework identifies key elements of effective cooperative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing. These principles promote not only content mastery but also interpersonal and metacognitive development. (Slavin in Sujariati, 2020), in his Cooperative Learning Theory, extended this by emphasizing the motivational dimensions of group learning. According to him, the alignment of individual success with group success fosters a sense of shared responsibility, which enhances engagement and persistence. His research showed that group-based learning structures, such as STAD (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions) and Jigsaw, result in significantly higher academic outcomes compared to traditional methods.

Cognitively, collaborative learning leverages peer scaffolding, allowing students to support each other's understanding through clarification, negotiation of meaning, and joint problem-solving (Xu et al., 2023). From an affective perspective, such environments reduce learner anxiety and increase self-confidence, especially among language learners who may be hesitant to tings (Nurhayati & Kaha, 2022). Moreover, group learning aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learners perform beyond their current level of competence through guided interaction with peers (Lasmawan & Budiarta, 2020). Empirical studies have confirmed these benefits. For example, researchers have found that students engaged in collaborative vocabulary tasks not only retained more words but also developed better meta-linguistic awareness and communicative competence (Ariffin, 2021). In line with these findings, Anwar, Setyaji, and Ambarini (2023) demonstrated that small group discussions significantly improved students' speaking abilities by promoting peer interaction, critical thinking, and collective problem-solving. Their study reinforces the notion that group-based activities can enhance not only vocabulary retention but also broader language competencies, such as speaking fluency and confidence (Anwar et al., 2023). The combination of active engagement, repetition, and social feedback makes group learning particularly effective for language acquisition. However, while the pedagogical and theoretical appeal of group learning is evident, its efficacy in primary school English vocabulary instruction remains under-researched in empirical contexts, especially in developing or multilingual countries.

### **Empirical Studies on Group Learning in Language Acquisition**

Recent empirical studies offer insights into the dynamics of group learning in language classrooms. A quasi-experimental study by (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021) involving Vietnamese EFL students showed that cooperative group tasks significantly enhanced vocabulary retention and usage accuracy. The authors

attributed these gains to meaningful peer interaction and contextualized practice, which provided learners with multiple exposures to target words in varied contexts. Similarly, a study by (Martini et al., 2019) investigated collaborative learning in young language learners and found that children not only engaged more actively with vocabulary during group activities but also transferred learned words more effectively into new tasks. Their findings support the hypothesis that collaboration enhances not only cognitive engagement but also memory consolidation.

In a study conducted in Turkey, (Özdemir & Aydın, 2020) implemented group work in a flipped classroom environment for vocabulary instruction. Their results indicated a significant improvement in both the quantity and quality of vocabulary learned, particularly among students with initially lower proficiency levels. The authors argue that group dynamics allow for differentiated learning paths, enabling peer-to-peer scaffolding that benefits weaker learners without diminishing the progress of stronger ones. (Chen & Hwang, 2020) explored collaborative digital storytelling in Taiwanese elementary classrooms as a tool for vocabulary learning. Their results showed that students who worked in groups to create digital narratives acquired significantly more vocabulary and demonstrated higher levels of engagement compared to those in teacher-centered instruction. In a similar vein, Stevani, Ambarini, and Setyorini (2023) investigated the effectiveness of the Let's Read app in enhancing reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition among primary school students. Their study demonstrated that visual and auditory learning tools, when integrated into group learning activities, significantly boosted students' vocabulary retention and engagement in language tasks (Stevani et al., 2023). Importantly, this study highlighted that task authenticity and creative collaboration play a crucial role in vocabulary development.

In another relevant study, (Mahasneh & Alwan, 2019) conducted an experimental study in Jordanian primary schools to compare traditional vocabulary teaching with cooperative learning strategies. Students in the cooperative learning group showed greater vocabulary gains and reported higher motivation levels. These outcomes suggest that active learning environments may counteract the passive learning patterns often observed in language instruction at the primary level. Despite these encouraging results, there are noticeable limitations in the existing literature. First, many studies focus on secondary or tertiary-level learners, with fewer addressing young learners in elementary schools. Second, most research adopts either a purely qualitative or descriptive approach, limiting the generalizability and replicability of the findings (Safari et al., 2023). Few studies employ robust experimental designs with control groups and standardized assessment tools to rigorously measure learning outcomes.

Furthermore, there is a significant geographical imbalance in research. Much of the existing literature originates from East Asian or Western contexts, whereas research from Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia is relatively scarce. Given the linguistic diversity and unique educational challenges in these contexts, there is a critical need for localized studies that can inform context-specific pedagogical interventions (Machiridza et al., 2025). Another underexplored area is the longitudinal impact of group learning on vocabulary retention. While many studies report short-term gains, few examine whether learners retain and use newly acquired vocabulary over time or transfer it to other academic domains. Additionally, the interaction between group composition (e.g., mixed-ability vs. same-ability groups) and learning outcomes remains insufficiently theorized and tested (Pourmousavi & Zenouzagh, 2020).

## **METHOD**

To rigorously investigate the impact of group learning on vocabulary memorization and English academic performance among primary school students, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach. A mixed-method design enables triangulation, thereby enhancing both the internal validity and the interpretive depth of the findings (Creswell, 2018). Specifically, the study combined quasi-experimental and qualitative inquiry to measure both the quantifiable outcomes of group learning and the learners' subjective experiences.

The quasi-experimental design employed a pre-test and post-test structure with a non-randomized control group. This design was selected due to the natural constraints of classroom settings, where random assignment is often impractical. The experimental group engaged in structured group learning sessions, while the control group received traditional, teacher-led vocabulary instruction. Both groups were tested before and after the intervention using the same assessment instruments to determine learning gains. To complement the quantitative data, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews were conducted. These qualitative methods were aimed at exploring the students' perceptions of group learning, their affective responses, and the social dynamics that may have influenced vocabulary acquisition. FGDs allow for rich, interactive data, especially suitable for understanding young learners' experiences in collaborative learning contexts (Safrodin & Falah, 2024).

The target population for this study comprised sixth-grade students in public elementary schools located in Semarang City, Indonesia. The sampling method utilized was purposive stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across gender and academic performance strata. A total of 60 students were selected, with 30 assigned to the experimental group and 30 to the control group. The selection criteria were based on class accessibility, teacher availability, and willingness to



participate. This sample size is deemed appropriate for quasi-experimental designs in educational research.

The primary quantitative instrument was a standardized vocabulary test adapted from (Nation in Lutfiyah et al., 2022), which was adapted to align with the students' curriculum and the specific indicators of vocabulary mastery. This test aimed to assess students' ability to recognize, comprehend, and use vocabulary in contextualized settings. Additionally, a classroom observation guide was utilized, encompassing indicators of student engagement, social interaction, and group dynamics during the implementation of group learning activities. For qualitative data collection, a focus group discussion (FGD) question guide was designed drawing on previous studies related to motivation, active participation, and peer support to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of group learning (Naeem et al., 2023). These instruments were carefully crafted to capture both the measurable outcomes and experiential aspects of the learning process.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumptions of normality and homogeneity were examined using Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Levene's test. The primary statistical analyses included paired sample t-tests to evaluate within-group improvements, and independent sample t-test to evaluate each group significant different score. This analytic strategy enhances the reliability of causal inference in non-randomized designs (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following (Naeem et al., 2023) six-phase approach. Coding was conducted inductively and iteratively, allowing for the emergence of patterns related to peer collaboration, motivation, and vocabulary use in context. NVivo 12 software was utilized to support data organization and transparency.

## **FINDING**

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of the study, focusing on (1) the effectiveness of group learning to improve students' vocabulary mastery, (2) thematic patterns derived from student interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), and (3) additional observations regarding the role of individual learner characteristics in group-based vocabulary learning.



Source:documentation from the reasearcher

### **Quantitative Results: The effectiveness of group learning to improve students' vocabulary mastery**

To assess the effect of group learning on vocabulary acquisition, both control and experimental groups underwent pre-test and post-test evaluations. The mean scores are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Mean Vocabulary Scores of Control and Experimental Groups**

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Pre-Test Mean</b>	<b>Post-Test Mean</b>
Control Group	52.3	57.1
Experimental Group	51.8	73.4

Source: processed data from the researcher

The data presented in the table showing the mean vocabulary scores of the control and experimental groups indicate a notable difference in learning outcomes following the intervention. Both groups began with comparable pre-test mean scores (Control: 52.3; Experimental: 51.8), suggesting initial equivalence in vocabulary proficiency. However, after the instructional period, the experimental group exhibited a substantial increase in their post-test mean score (73.4), markedly surpassing the control group's more modest improvement (57.1).

**Table 2. Result of Experimental Groups' Paired Sample T-test**

<b>Pair</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Pre-test	21.6	0.964	4.775	0.000
Post-test				

Source: processed data from the researcher

The results of the paired sample t-test for the experimental group indicate a statistically significant improvement in vocabulary scores from pre-test to post-test. The mean increase of 21.6 points, with a calculated t-value of 4.775, exceeds the critical t-value (t-table) of approximately 2.045 at a 0.05 significance level with 29 degrees of freedom. Furthermore, the significance level ( $p = 0.000$ ) is well below the 0.05 threshold. Based on these criteria, the null hypothesis of no difference is

rejected, confirming that the group learning intervention led to a significant enhancement in students' vocabulary mastery within the experimental group.

**Table 3. Result of Independent Sample T-test**

Pair	Mean	t	Sig
Experimental group Control group	16,3	4.588	0.001

Source: processed data from the researcher

The results of the independent sample t-test reveal a significant difference in post-test vocabulary scores between the experimental and control groups. The mean difference of 16.3 points is accompanied by a t-value of 4.588, which exceeds the critical t-value (t-table) of approximately 2.000 at the 0.05 significance level with 58 degrees of freedom. Additionally, the significance level ( $p = 0.001$ ) is below the 0.05 threshold. These results indicate that the vocabulary improvement observed in the experimental group was significantly greater than that of the control group, demonstrating the effectiveness of the group learning intervention compared to traditional instruction.

### **Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussions**

To complement the quantitative data, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted based on transcripts from FGDs and semi-structured interviews with students in the experimental group. Thematic coding followed (Naeem et al., 2023) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis, resulting in the emergence of four dominant codes: Peer Support, Motivation Boost, Active Participation, and Confidence Development.

These thematic codes, along with their frequency of occurrence across the data corpus, are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4. Thematic Codes from Focus Group Discussions**

Thematic Code	Frequency
Peer Support	14
Motivation Boost	12
Active Participation	18
Confidence Development	10

Source: processed data from the researcher

The thematic analysis of the focus group discussions revealed four prominent themes reflecting students' experiences and perceptions of group learning: Peer Support, Motivation Boost, Active Participation, and Confidence Development. Among these, Active Participation emerged as the most frequently mentioned theme, indicating that group learning significantly encouraged students to engage actively in vocabulary learning tasks. Students reported that working collaboratively made them more willing to share ideas and clarify doubts, which may not occur in traditional, teacher-centered settings.

Peer Support was also a recurrent theme, highlighting the role of classmates in facilitating understanding and providing assistance during learning activities. This social support appears to create a positive learning environment that fosters cooperation and mutual aid. The theme Motivation Boost suggests that group interactions positively influenced students' enthusiasm and willingness to learn vocabulary. The collaborative context likely enhanced their intrinsic motivation by making learning more enjoyable and socially rewarding. In addition, Confidence Development was noted as an important affective outcome, with students expressing increased bravery in using new vocabulary due to the supportive and less intimidating atmosphere of group work. Overall, these thematic findings demonstrate that group learning not only improves cognitive aspects of vocabulary acquisition but also cultivates important social and emotional factors, such as motivation and self-confidence, which are essential for effective language learning.

#### **Individual Learner Characteristics and Group Learning Impact**

**Table 5. The Characteristics of Individual Learner in Group Learning**

<b>Characteristic / Impact</b>	<b>Observations on Number of Students / Groups</b>
Low Initial Ability	Significant score improvement observed in most students in the lower quartile
High Initial Ability	Mixed responses; some felt the pace was slow, while others enjoyed the collaboration
Extroverted / Social	Around 8-10 students took on leadership roles within their groups
Introverted / Quiet	Around 5-7 students required extra encouragement but felt comfortable in supportive groups
Increased Motivation and Self-Confidence	Majority of students reported higher motivation (12-18 times)
Cognitive Scaffolding and Peer Modeling	Frequently observed during group sessions, especially during repetition and vocabulary discussion
Group Dynamics and Responsibility	Well-composed groups showed high engagement; challenges arose in heterogeneous groups without facilitation

Source: processed data from the researcher

The findings indicate that students with low initial vocabulary proficiency experienced the most significant improvement in vocabulary acquisition after participating in group learning activities. This suggests that group learning effectively supports learners who begin with lower ability levels by providing them with opportunities for peer assistance and scaffolding. Students with higher initial proficiency displayed mixed reactions to group learning; some benefited from collaborative exchanges, while others felt that the group's pace slowed their individual progress. This variability points to the need for careful management of group dynamics to accommodate different learning speeds. Regarding social

characteristics, extroverted students often took leadership roles within their groups, which appeared to increase their engagement and motivation. In contrast, introverted students, while more reserved, benefited from the supportive environment of the group but required encouragement to participate actively. Cognitive support through peer modeling and scaffolding was frequently observed, with more proficient students assisting others in understanding and using vocabulary. This collaborative interaction helped reduce individual cognitive load and enhanced vocabulary retention. Finally, well-structured groups demonstrated high levels of responsibility and engagement among members, whereas groups with less balanced composition faced challenges in ensuring equal participation. These findings highlight the importance of effective group composition and facilitation to maximize learning outcomes in collaborative settings

## **DISCUSSION**

The primary aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of group learning in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and English academic performance among primary school students. The findings indicated a statistically significant improvement in vocabulary retention and overall language performance for students who engaged in structured group learning environments. To understand the underlying mechanisms of these outcomes, it is critical to interpret the results through a multi-theoretical lens, particularly grounded in the works of (Vygotsky in Lasmawan & Budiarta, 2020), (Slavin in Sujariati, 2020), and (Nation in Lutfiyah et al., 2022).

### **Theoretical Interpretation of Findings**

From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provides a robust explanatory framework for the results. The ZPD represents the range of tasks that a learner cannot yet perform independently but can accomplish with guidance from more capable peers or adults (Vygotsky in Lasmawan & Budiarta, 2020). In the context of this study, students in the experimental group benefited from peer-assisted learning, where scaffolding was facilitated through collaborative vocabulary tasks. This scaffolding allowed less proficient students to engage in activities slightly beyond their current competence, thus accelerating language development. (Shafiai et al., 2024) further underscore that language learning is not simply the internalization of discrete items but a socially mediated process shaped by interaction and participation. In group settings, learners engage in co-constructed meaning-making, which facilitates deeper processing of lexical items and enhances retention. This is particularly relevant in vocabulary learning, where understanding semantic nuances often requires contextual usage and dialogic negotiation.

Building upon the social framework, Slavins' (in Sujariati, 2020) Cooperative Learning Theory posits that group-based instruction improves academic outcomes due to positive interdependence and individual accountability. These mechanisms were evident in the group learning sessions where students relied on each other to complete tasks and held each member responsible for their contribution. This structure enhanced engagement and encouraged repeated exposure to vocabulary items in meaningful contexts, an essential factor in vocabulary retention (Nation in Lutfiyah et al., 2022). Vocabulary learning emphasized the importance of multiple encounters with new words across varied contexts. The interactive nature of group work naturally fosters such repetition. During collaborative tasks, learners are exposed to the same lexical items repeatedly through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This multimodal engagement, supported by social interaction, may explain the significant post-test gains in the experimental group.

#### **Why Group Learning Is Effective: Cognitive, Social, and Affective Factors**

The effectiveness of group learning observed in this study can be attributed to three interrelated dimensions: cognitive scaffolding, peer modeling, and affective support. *Firstly*, group settings enable cognitive scaffolding, where more competent peers guide others by breaking down complex vocabulary into understandable units, offering synonyms, paraphrases, and usage examples. This mirrors (Setyaningrum et al., 2024) notion of the instructional scaffold, which helps learners bridge the gap between what they know and what they are capable of understanding. Cognitive load is reduced through distributed effort, allowing learners to focus on processing rather than retrieval or rote memorization (Oktaviyanthi et al., 2024). *Secondly*, peer modeling plays a pivotal role. According to (Bozca & Koban Koç, 2023) Social Learning Theory, individuals learn behaviors and strategies by observing others. In this study, students frequently mirrored the lexical strategies used by their peers, such as mnemonics, chunking, or contextual guessing, which contributed to both awareness and acquisition of vocabulary. Such observation not only reinforces correct language use but also introduces alternative perspectives, enriching the learning experience. *Thirdly*, affective factors such as motivation, confidence, and reduced anxiety were recurrent themes in focus group discussions. Learners expressed that working in groups made them feel less intimidated and more willing to participate. This psychological safety is crucial in language learning, where fear of making mistakes can hinder performance. The emotional comfort of being among peers likely facilitated risk-taking, experimentation, and more sustained attention to task, all of which enhance vocabulary retention (Ayiz & Tauchid, 2025).



Source:documentation from the researcher

### **Comparison with Previous Studies**

The present findings reported by (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021), who documented significant improvements in vocabulary retention following group learning interventions. Similarly, (Firthouz, 2024) emphasized that learners engaged in collaborative environments tend to interact more deeply with lexical materials, which facilitates enhanced retention and recall. These converging results underscore the effectiveness of group-based learning strategies in fostering meaningful vocabulary acquisition, thereby reinforcing the theoretical premise that social interaction plays a critical role in language development.

In addition, the results of this study are congruent with previous empirical investigations into the benefits of cooperative learning. For instance, (Mahasneh & Alwan, 2019) found that Jordanian primary students in cooperative learning environments exhibited significant gains in vocabulary acquisition and academic self-efficacy. Similarly, Özdemir and Aydin (2020), in their study of Turkish EFL learners, reported that group-based tasks improved vocabulary knowledge and learner engagement, especially in flipped classroom settings. (Tu, 2022) also highlighted the importance of collaboration for vocabulary retention, emphasizing that active participation in group tasks led to more robust and transferable lexical knowledge, findings collectively affirm that group learning is not only effective across cultural contexts but also adaptable to varied instructional formats. However, some discrepancies in the literature should be acknowledged. (Zulfikar et al., 2024) argued that group learning might be less effective for highly introverted students who may withdraw from interaction. Although this was not a predominant issue in our study, a few participants in the experimental group did express discomfort in highly vocal groups, suggesting that group dynamics must be intentionally managed to ensure equitable participation. Furthermore, while most previous studies focused on university or secondary-level learners, the present study contributes uniquely by focusing on young learners in primary education, thereby filling a significant gap in vocabulary learning research at the elementary level.

This observation of individual learner characteristics and group learning impact resonates with the findings of (Özdemir & Aydin, 2020), who reported that group-based learning disproportionately benefits lower-proficiency learners due to the availability of peer scaffolding and contextual repetition. These students also referred to the importance of peer modelling, watching how more proficient group members approached vocabulary tasks, which contributed to deeper learning. Conversely, high-performing students expressed mixed feelings. While some appreciated the collaborative setting, others felt constrained by the slower pace of group consensus. This supports (Waro' & Amaliyah, 2023) caution that heterogeneous group composition must be carefully managed to balance the needs of diverse learners.

Another layer of analysis concerned learners' social dispositions. Students identified as highly sociable or extroverted were more likely to assume leadership roles within their groups, taking charge of task organization and discussion. These students reported increased engagement and a sense of ownership over their learning process. In contrast, more reserved students tended to benefit from the supportive nature of the group but required more encouragement to contribute equally. These findings suggest that group dynamics and individual traits are mediating variables in the relationship between collaborative instruction and vocabulary gains. Future studies should explore how best to configure groups for maximal benefit across learner types.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data presents a compelling argument for the efficacy of group learning in vocabulary development. The statistically significant gains in the experimental group's post-test scores substantiate the impact of collaborative strategies on lexical retention. Furthermore, thematic insights from FGDs enrich our understanding by revealing the social-emotional mechanisms, such as peer support, motivation, and confidence, that underpin these gains. Such findings reinforce the theoretical model that views vocabulary learning as a socially mediated process (Nation & Webb, 2011). They also highlight the need for teachers to consider group composition, task design, and learner profiles when implementing collaborative learning to ensure equitable participation and outcomes. This mixed-method investigation affirms that group learning, when carefully structured and purposefully facilitated, offers a powerful tool to enhance vocabulary acquisition and academic confidence among primary learners. These results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting collaborative pedagogy in language education and invite further research on optimizing its implementation in diverse educational contexts.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

One of the principal strengths of this study lies in its mixed-methods design, which enabled a holistic understanding of group learning's impact by combining



statistical evidence with rich qualitative narratives. The integration of quantitative data (pre-test and post-test scores) and thematic analysis of student reflections enhances the credibility and depth of the findings. Additionally, the use of real classroom settings and existing school curricula enhances the ecological validity of the research, allowing findings to be directly applicable to everyday educational practice. Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. *Firstly*, the sample size (N=60) restricts generalizability. While sufficient for initial analysis, larger samples across multiple schools and regions would provide stronger statistical power and broader insights. *Secondly*, the study duration, approximately four weeks, may not fully capture the long-term retention of vocabulary or its transfer to other language skills such as writing or reading comprehension. Future research should incorporate delayed post-tests to measure sustained learning. *Thirdly*, while focus group discussions offered valuable insights into learner perceptions, teacher perspectives were not systematically explored. Understanding how educators perceive and facilitate group learning could enrich the data and provide guidance for professional development programs. *Lastly*, group composition was based on classroom teacher discretion, not randomized or experimentally assigned. As a result, pre-existing friendships or tensions may have influenced group dynamics and outcomes.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The study's findings offer several important implications for pedagogical practice, particularly in primary education contexts. *Firstly*, educators should consider integrating group learning modules into vocabulary instruction. These modules should include structured roles, cooperative goals, and assessment tools that promote positive interdependence and individual accountability. *Secondly*, teacher training programs should emphasize facilitation skills necessary for managing group learning environments, skills such as conflict resolution, inclusive participation techniques, and scaffolding strategies. As (Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha, 2023) note, the success of cooperative learning is contingent upon effective teacher facilitation. *Thirdly*, schools should explore the development of collaborative learning materials tailored for young learners, such as story-based group activities, vocabulary games, or peer-led dialogues. These materials should be designed to cater to different proficiency levels and learning styles.

Furthermore, the study supports the inclusion of formative assessment practices that evaluate not only vocabulary acquisition but also interpersonal skills developed through collaboration, such as communication, empathy, and leadership. These so-called "soft skills" are increasingly valued in modern educational paradigms (Sutarman et al., 2019). *Lastly*, policy makers and curriculum developers should recognize the value of socially embedded learning. In multilingual and

multicultural settings like Indonesia, group learning not only improves linguistic competence but also nurtures social cohesion and intercultural awareness.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of group learning on vocabulary acquisition and English academic performance among sixth-grade primary school students by employing a mixed-methods approach grounded in sociocultural, cooperative, and lexical acquisition theories. The findings demonstrate that students who participated in structured group learning significantly outperformed their peers receiving traditional instruction, showing notable improvements in vocabulary retention, confidence, motivation, and engagement. These results support Vygotsky's concept of socially mediated learning within the Zone of Proximal Development, Slavin's Cooperative Learning Theory emphasizing positive interdependence, and Nation's insights on the importance of repeated, contextual exposure to vocabulary. Furthermore, qualitative data revealed that group learning fosters peer support, active participation, and confidence-building, particularly benefiting low-performing and introverted students, thus highlighting its inclusivity and adaptability. Despite some limitations, such as sample size and duration, this research contributes valuable empirical evidence from a Southeast Asian context and underscores the pedagogical value of integrating well-facilitated group learning strategies into primary English education to enhance linguistic competence and academic achievement.

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