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MODERN EDUCATION
(IJMOE)www.ijmoe.comTHE EFFECTIVENESS OF VOCABULARY GAMES ON
VOCABULARY ACQUISITION: A LITERATURE REVIEWNor Afifa Nordin^{1*}, Puteri Nur Hidayah Kamaludin², Nurshaza Farah Md Sharif³, Mohamad Zaky Chumari⁴, Nursyafiqah Zabidin⁵¹ Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka, Malaysia

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This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

Acquiring language skills, namely listening, reading, speaking and writing, is fundamentally dependent on the mastery of vocabulary. Thus, teachers' application of attractive, entertaining and interactive activities in language lessons, specifically vocabulary games stands to be vital to stimulate vocabulary enrichment. The purpose of this study is to study the literature review of previous research on the effectiveness of vocabulary games on English language learners' vocabulary acquisition. This study employed a qualitative method in examining previous research documents related to the effects of vocabulary games towards acquiring vocabulary. The analysis found that mastering vocabulary is enhanced through the usage of vocabulary games in the process of teaching and learning English. The implementation of vocabulary games also encourages teamwork, motivation, and enjoyment which provide an optimal platform for learners to learn the language in useful and meaningful context. Hence, the study proposed that teachers should apply vocabulary games strategically to help learners garner a wide range of vocabulary.

Keywords:

Games, Teaching Strategies, Vocabulary Acquisition

Introduction

Skills in language acquisition include listening, reading, speaking and writing. Fundamentally, to develop these language skills, the highest priority and concern should be centred around vocabulary mastery. To illustrate, limited or restricted or insufficient range of vocabulary deters or disrupts learners' ability of understanding basic concepts through reading and listening and practising or using the language in writing or oral communication. Thornbury (2006) agreed that vocabulary mastery outshines grammar as minimal language development could occur without grammar, conversely, zero development could happen without vocabulary.

The education system in Malaysia has integrated the Common European Framework of Reference for its English as second language learners (Lucas et al., 2020). Regardless of plan of reformation, vocabulary acquisition remains a problem and seen as time consuming and learners still lack proficiency in the target language (Yunus et al., 2016). This strengthens the need for a proper implementation of teaching strategies in optimising language learning, namely, vocabulary acquisition which is heavily influenced by learners' multi varied background, interests and language acquisition level. A strategy that has gained interest among language teachers is the in-class vocabulary games. Games has become prevalent in the lives of young learners so the application of such activity could be introduced and used in stimulating learners' vocabulary attainment (Fitriyah & Indah, 2022) Thus, this study examines previous research findings on the effectiveness of in-class application of vocabulary games on English language learners' vocabulary acquisition.

Literature Review

According to Tovar Viera (2017) learning vocabulary is acquiring word meanings and functions in different contexts and situations. Zaitun and Hanifah (2023) and Lucas et al. (2020) added that enhancing learners' word bank is deemed more important in language learning than mastering other language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Vocabulary serves as the foundation of other skills as once learners acquire sufficient words, communication could happen with ease. Learners then could comprehend messages and have the ability to choose the right word in expressing their thoughts based on situation and context. Without such ability, learners lose a sense of confidence and are demotivated to communicate in the target language (Fitriyah & Rohmani, 2022).

Learning Vocabulary

Both educators and learners face issues in regards to teaching and learning vocabulary. Al-Qahtani (2015) mentioned in regards to vocabulary teaching, educators find it difficult to teach as they are uncertain of the best practices on how to build learners' educational focus on word acquisition. Ultimately, educators resort to applying traditional/conventional teaching methodology in teaching vocabulary, namely, providing synonyms, memorisation, and oral explanation from teachers (Lucas et al. (2020)). Susanto et al. (2019) further emphasised some educators even fail to consider providing appropriate word difficulty levels used according to learners' English language levels. Similarly, Baleghizadeh and Ashoori (2011) reported that in learners' initial stages of acquiring a language, the majority highlighted a particular confusion on choosing appropriate vocabulary learning strategy.

As a result of this, language learners experience difficulties in acquiring vocabulary, classroom lessons turn passive and questions are left unanswered since learners are unable to find the right word and pronunciation, in turn making the class session dull and boring (Apria, Rumiri &

Syarfi, 2021). Saputra and Hadi (2019) stated that further reasons for issues in comprehending and learning vocabulary include boring learning approaches and inappropriate teaching materials, could lead to lowering students' enthusiasm in word learning and confusing content and concepts. Lucas et al. (2020) also informed that as learners begin to project a lack of interest in learning the target language, they also avoid participating in anything related to the language. This unwillingness attitude could hinder the progress in acquiring the language as they shun away from even responding to questions and interacting with friends. Therefore, to encourage learners' vocabulary learning, attractive and interactive learning methods are required, in this case specifically, vocabulary games.

Vocabulary Games in Learning Vocabulary

Hadfield (2003) defined games as activities to be played with a set of rules, objectives and evoke the elements of fun. Kurniah et al. (2020) believed that learners appreciate this method as learning happens unconsciously and is an enjoyable experience. Due to this, Fitriyah and Indah (2022) believed that as learners are more comfortable and pleasant in vocabulary lessons, teaching content delivered could be comprehended and grasped with ease. Lakkham and Kulsirisawad (2020) further added games to create an environment that made students more inclined towards participating actively in tasks involving group work and creativity. Therefore, Saputra and Hadi (2019) injected that with games in learning, anxiety levels could be minimised and enthusiasm heightened which simultaneously allow play, interaction, and friendly competitions among learners. Below are other findings in regards to the effectiveness of vocabulary games in English language acquisition.

**Table 1: Previous Research on The Effectiveness of Vocabulary Games
on Vocabulary acquisition**

No	Authors	Findings
1	Yihsiang Kuo and Hsiao-Yun Ho (2012)	Word card strategy is more effective than word list strategy in foreign language word retention as learners are able to remember words in long-term memory. Learners mentioned prefer word card strategy as they could carry cards more convenient than word list in an A4 size paper.
2	Hooshang Khoshsima, Amin Saed and Arash Yazdani (2015)	Participants were grouped into two: control and experimental group. Prior were taught new words by the traditional method which are translation, memorisation, constant reading and other rote learning activities. Meanwhile, the latter were taught using instructional games to reinforce and fix what has already been taught. The study found that the experimental group made significant progress during the course of the study.
3	Ayesha Perveen, Muhammad Asif, Sidra Mehmood, Muhammad Kamal Khan and Zafar Iqbal (2016)	Teachers reported that learners are able to learn meanings of words, utter and create their own sentences using words learned in games. Although initially, teachers experienced difficulty in implementing vocabulary games in lessons, they eventually adjusted time and class management accordingly. Teachers also stated that learners are

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| | motivated and enjoy learning with fun games. On the other hand, most learners agreed that vocabulary games facilitated in creating meaningful and useful language context and helped them sustain interest in learning vocabulary. |
| 4 | <p>Tri Ramadhaniarti (2016)</p> <p>Through observation and interview, learners were found to be happy, participative and interactive with one another in the classroom while playing games. Learners recorded that playing games is fun, interesting, challenging and could remember words easily. They are also more confident in communicating using English and unafraid of producing mistakes.</p> |
| 5 | <p>Darrell Wilkinson (2020)</p> <p>Based on the analysis of pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test, learners achieve the learning outcomes in passive recall knowledge, active recall knowledge and written cloze. In other words, learners could retain and remember vocabulary in short tem and long term by studying new words using premade and making their own word cards.</p> |
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Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design and an internet library research approach specifically on Google Scholar. Five related journal articles portraying the effects of vocabulary language games on learners' vocabulary acquisition were selected mainly on the recently published research articles. In analysing the data, the results of the studies are reviewed and analysed specifically: types of games and effectiveness of the vocabulary games on learners' word learning, and later presented in tabular form. Based on the findings of the studied journal articles, conclusions were drawn on the vocabulary games effectiveness towards language learners.

The research articles gathered and analysed include a study by Chai and Yunus (2021) on the effectiveness of a card game called Vocabulary Connect Four Circles (VC4C) on learners' vocabulary acquisition. Another study was chosen from Fitriyah and Rohmani (2022) on the effects of applying word lists as a vocabulary game in English language lessons. Teachers are required to write letters on the board and students are then asked to brainstorm and form words in 10 minutes. These words are later to be written on the board and teachers then check to discuss and correct the vocabulary list. One other related study involves a ranking card game in Zaitun and Hanifah's study (2023) where students are required to work in groups and are given a rank card which they must determine and arrange based on the importance and priority. Learners then present the group's decision. Additionally, vocabulary card game's application in language classrooms was also studied by Kurniah et al. (2020). The learners compete in finding similar pictures and naming images displayed on the card. Meanwhile, Wahyudi and Kusumawardani (2024) studied the usage of word search puzzle games where learners are needed to search for hidden words, vertically, horizontally, diagonally, in columns of words.

Findings

Based on the analysis of journal articles related to the effectiveness of vocabulary games, three distinctive themes and reasons emerged in support of its implementation in teaching and learning of the English language vocabulary.

Table 2: Recent Literature on Effectiveness of Vocabulary Games on Vocabulary Mastery

No	Authors & Types of Vocabulary Games	Findings/Result of study
1	Chai Kar Ni & Melor Md Yunus (2021) - VC4C Card Game	Participants performed better in post-test after the implementation of VC4C Card Game. In the questionnaire, enjoyment, fun, positive experiences were highlighted by participants. Through observation, learning objective was attained as improvement was apparent since participants showed ability to read, spell and identify word meanings. Participants also portrayed a high motivational level as participation and interest towards the game increased. During the game, communication occurred as most participants collaborated with peers in providing meaning of words formed.
2	Fitriyah & Rohmani Nur Indah (2022) - Word lists	Due to the ease in implementing the rules of playing the game, students showed positive reactions as they are able to understand and play the game smoothly. The game invites students to a duel or competition among classmates to form a word list from the letters provided. This boosts enthusiasm as learners become active in their eagerness to participate and work in teams to list as many words as they could to win the game. Learners also work together to write and pronounce words, and should any mistake occur, learners correct it as a team. Although learners' limited vocabulary produced a struggle for some learners to continue listing the words, nevertheless, the enjoyment during the game was not interrupted.
3	Zaitun Zaitun & Hanifah Anis Rafilah (2022) - Ranking Card Games	Pre- and post-test was administered to the participants after the card game was executed during the learning session to examine the effectiveness of using ranking card games in vocabulary mastery. Participants produced less mistakes in the post-test and could answer most of the questions correctly. The result of the study, thus, shows ranking card games could be used in building learners' vocabulary acquisition.
4	Suci Ayu Kurniah P., Rusliana, & Erna Fitriani Pratiwi (2020) - Spot It! Card Game	The result of the quiz which was provided to review participants' vocabulary knowledge after playing is the enhancement of achievement in vocabulary mastery. Participants could match pictures, identify and name pictures and spell the words correctly. In the questionnaire, participants agreed that the card game is effective in allowing participants to capture and memorise new words as images are presented

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| | | together with the words making them easy to remember. Participants also agreed that learning vocabulary through card games is better than memorising for learning sessions are less stressful and more fun. |
| 5 | Wahyudi & Kusumahwardani (2024) - Word Search Puzzle Game | Utilising word search puzzle game is effective in learners' vocabulary acquisition as the study reported a significant increase in participants' vocabulary knowledge in the post-test. As the vocabulary game managed to capture participants' attention, the activity was engaging and interactive. It also aids in vocabulary retention. The game presented a challenge to the participants as they try to remember the hidden words and through repeated engagement with words enriches fun and further makes the game addictive to its players. |
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Vocabulary Mastery And Vocabulary Retention Booster

The journal articles analysed recorded significant differences in learners' vocabulary achievement and performance before and after vocabulary games were introduced. Thus, these results portrayed that adopting unconventional teaching strategies: vocabulary games, could allow learners to experience learning a language in a more interesting and engaging environment away from their accustomed teaching and learning sessions. This encourages learners to be involved in participating and playing the game while subconsciously practising, improving by adding new vocabulary to their word bank and remembering the vocabulary through repetitive play and interactions among learners. Contrastly, memorisation, textbook activities and oral explanations by teachers could hinder vocabulary acquisition as classes are dull and confusing (Lucas et al. (2020); Saputra & Hadi (2019).

Motivational Booster

Moreover, participants of the study reported having significant positive, constructive, and fun experiences while playing vocabulary games. Some features of the game attracts them to participate actively as games are designed with colourful visuals and images to capture interests and also assist them in identifying and memorising the words. The games are also engaging as learners have to meet the objective of the game as a team and working together allows learners to become active as they compete to become the winner of the game. Lakkham and Kulsirisawad (2020) supported this as learners are more motivated to participate in activities involving collaboration and group work.

Confidence Booster

With the utilisation of vocabulary games, participants also showed significant involvement during vocabulary lessons. This could be contributed to the peer assistance received throughout the game. As learners combine their effort in achieving the winning title for the game, anxiety levels are lowered and learners portray and boost their confidence by encouraging and supporting one another to identify, pronounce, spell and provide meanings to the words correctly. Saputra and Hadi (2019) believed play and interaction arise as anxiety minimises. Thus, this shows that vocabulary acquisition and retention could occur in learner-centred classrooms where learners take control of their own learning in achieving a goal or completing a task.

Conclusion

In vocabulary learning, selecting appropriate teaching strategies to assist and build learners' word bank remains significant. The prevalence of games in the lives of learners should be made use in their process of learning. Supported by the previous and recent literature review, studied and analysed, applying vocabulary games in vocabulary lessons definitely have positive effects towards learners' vocabulary acquisition. This, therefore, suggests that teachers should implement vocabulary games as they are interesting and engaging classroom activities for learners to participate and experience collaborative learning since both are vital to enhance and increase their practice of the language during lessons and long term vocabulary retention. Nevertheless, the vocabulary games implementation should come with thorough consideration and testing.

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