

Game-Based Vocabulary Building Activities Material in English

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Vocabulary is a fundamental component of English proficiency, serving as the foundation for listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and underpinning overall reading comprehension. Learners can express ideas effectively only through the words they know, and a broad, varied vocabulary enables more precise and complex communication. Consequently, vocabulary knowledge has a direct impact on achievement in both reading and writing.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional learning delivery, generating anxiety and disengagement among students, particularly in subjects taught in a second language, such as English. This concern is further underscored by the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, which revealed low performance among Filipino students in reading. The Philippines ranked 79th globally, with over 80% of students failing to reach the minimum proficiency level and a mean score of 340 compared to the OECD average of 487—one of the largest proportions of low performers among participating countries and

economies.

In response to these challenges, integrating games into lesson delivery has emerged as an effective strategy to enhance engagement and facilitate learning. Whether implemented interactively, online, or offline, game-based activities function as both instructional tools and formative assessment methods, promoting active participation and sustained motivation. There is, therefore, a pressing need to enhance English vocabulary instruction through game-based approaches. By employing interactive, engaging, and contextually meaningful games, teachers can help learners expand their vocabulary, improve comprehension, and strengthen language production, equipping students with the skills required to succeed in 21st-century learning environments.

The Use of Game-Based Approach in Enhancing English Vocabulary

Vocabulary, alongside phonetics and grammar, is fundamental for mastering a foreign language, as it underpins the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Insufficient vocabulary knowledge hampers language proficiency and may demotivate learners, given that effective communication depends heavily on the words one possesses. Consequently, teaching vocabulary is a central component of language instruction, enabling second language learners to comprehend and express ideas in both spoken and written forms (Hombali, 2018).

Despite its importance, several persistent challenges impede vocabulary acquisition. According to Susanto (2021), many students struggle with correct pronunciation, accurate spelling, and understanding grammatical inflections, all of which complicate the internalization of new

vocabulary. Additional difficulties include selecting the appropriate meaning of words, using terms correctly in context, and interpreting idiomatic or figurative language. Surmanov and Azimova (2020) further note that learners often lack confidence in effective vocabulary-learning strategies and may be uncertain about how to adopt a focused and systematic approach.

Research indicates that educational games are a highly effective tool for addressing these challenges in English language classrooms. While game-based learning is not a new concept, it has gained recognition for its capacity to create engaging, interactive environments that facilitate meaningful language use. Arcagok (2021) emphasizes that game-based activities enhance motivation, provide enjoyable and interactive learning experiences, and support the acquisition of targeted vocabulary. These activities offer contextualized practice opportunities, allowing learners to apply new words in problem-solving tasks, collaborative exercises, and real-life scenarios. Through repeated exposure and active engagement, students can improve pronunciation, spelling, and contextual understanding while reducing the anxiety often associated with language learning.

Game-based practices also support cognitive, socio-emotional, and psychomotor skills, often resulting in higher academic achievement compared to traditional instructional methods (Alotaibi, 2024; Hibana et al., 2024; Manninen et al., 2024). Notably, preschool and primary learners benefit more from game-based vocabulary instruction than secondary students, likely due to their curiosity, enthusiasm, and openness to playful learning. Vocabulary games such as word matching, charades, crossword puzzles, and role-playing activities provide repeated yet varied exposure to new terms, reinforcing retention and promoting deeper processing of word meanings.

Plass et al. (2020) identified four theoretical foundations that underpin the effectiveness of game-based learning: motivational, cognitive, affective, and sociocultural. Motivation, often the strongest driver, is sustained through enjoyable game mechanics, incentive systems, and opportunities for “graceful failure,” where mistakes are treated as learning steps rather than setbacks. Cognitively, games encourage active recall, contextualized application, and problem-solving, all critical for long-term vocabulary retention. Affectively, they reduce anxiety and increase enjoyment, while socioculturally, they foster collaborative interactions, allowing learners to use target vocabulary in authentic communication with peers.

Ultimately, integrating game-based activities into English vocabulary instruction addresses common learning challenges while transforming vocabulary acquisition into a dynamic, enjoyable, and highly effective process. By providing a safe, stimulating environment for practice, these activities bridge the gap between word recognition and fluent, contextually appropriate use in real-life communication.

The Effectiveness of Game-Based Activity Materials in English: A Case Study

This study aimed to develop and enhance game-based activity sheet materials designed to improve the vocabulary performance of Grade 8 learners in English, with particular emphasis on reading and writing skills. Specifically, the study examined learners’ current levels of English vocabulary development, the effectiveness of various learning activities, preferred approaches to vocabulary acquisition, and peer evaluations of the newly developed game-based vocabulary-building materials.

Methodology

The study employed descriptive methods with a focus on instructional development. Descriptive research is designed to examine existing conditions and generate insights that can inform improvements. In this study, the information gathered was intended to provide recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the game-based vocabulary-building materials.

Two groups of respondents participated in the study. The first group consisted of 20 teachers with experience teaching English 8, along with four specialists skilled in English instruction and the production of learning resource materials. The second group comprised 110 randomly selected Grade 8 students from four class sections.

Two types of research instruments were utilized. The first consisted of researcher-developed checklist questionnaires for teachers and students. The teacher checklist identified the approaches employed in teaching vocabulary, while the student checklist examined learning preferences. The second instrument was an adapted Learning Resource Materials Development and Evaluation (LRMDS) tool based on DepEd Guidelines and Processes for LRMDS Assessment and Evaluation, used to assess the effectiveness and quality of the developed materials. Teacher questionnaires were administered electronically via Google Forms, whereas student questionnaires were printed and distributed alongside learning modules, in alignment with the school's modular learning modality. Copies of the game-based vocabulary-building activities and evaluation tools were personally delivered to the specialist evaluators by the researcher.

Data collected from respondents were classified, tabulated, and encoded for analysis. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study, with participation being voluntary. Informed consent was obtained

from all participants, and parental consent was secured to ensure parents were aware of their children’s involvement. For data analysis, statistical techniques including mean, standard deviation, ranking, frequency, and percentage were employed.

Findings

Table 1 presents the results of the summative test scores in English for School Year 2019–2020. It shows the overall Mean Percentage Score (MPS) of the summative tests per quarter, which is only 56.14%, falling within the average level range of 35–65%.

Table 1

Summative test scores in English 8

| Quarter | Mean Percentage Score | Interpretation |
|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| First Quarter | 55.55% | Average |
| Second Quarter | 63.18% | Average |
| Third Quarter | 50.58% | Average |
| Fourth Quarter | 55.24% | Average |
| Over-all Level | 56.14% | Average |

Legend: Mastered=96-100%; Closely approximating mastery=86-95%; Moving towards mastery=66-85%; Average=35-65%; Low=15-34%; Absolutely no mastery=0-4%

Vocabulary competence is reflected in learners’ performance on summative assessments. Benlazar (2019) emphasizes that summative evaluation not only measures learners’ vocabulary knowledge but also influences the effectiveness of instructional strategies for vocabulary enhancement. Summative tests serve as a valuable tool for guiding teachers in designing lessons and materials that align with course objectives and address students’ learning needs. The results underscore the importance of exploring innovative strategies to strengthen learners’ vocabulary skills and optimize their language proficiency.

Table 2 presents the learning activities implemented by the teachers.

Table 2
Learning activities implemented by English 8 teachers

| Learning Activities | WAM | Interpretation |
|--|------------|-----------------------|
| Direct Approach | | |
| Identification of the parts of speech | 3.60 | Always |
| Picture study | 3.65 | Always |
| Use of signs and symbols | 3.35 | Oftentimes |
| Knowledge on grammar structure | 3.60 | Always |
| Use of prefixes, suffixes and root words | 3.35 | Oftentimes |
| Communicative Approach | | |
| Dialogue | 3.60 | Always |
| Debate | 3.15 | Oftentimes |
| Symposium | 3.10 | Oftentimes |
| Role playing | 3.70 | Always |
| News casting | 3.25 | Oftentimes |
| Total Physical Response | | |
| Charades | 3.50 | Always |
| Body Language | 3.40 | Oftentimes |
| Mimicking | 3.40 | Oftentimes |
| Singing | 3.40 | Oftentimes |
| Choral recitation | 3.35 | Oftentimes |
| Audio-Lingual Approach | | |
| Drills on pronunciation | 3.80 | Always |
| Manipulation of new vocabulary in daily conversation | 3.55 | Always |
| Appreciation of new vocabulary through constant use | 3.60 | Always |
| Application of the new learning as needed | 3.70 | Always |
| Model the vocabulary words in communication | 3.60 | Always |

Regarding direct approach activities, picture study emerged as the most frequently employed learning strategy, with a mean score of 3.65, interpreted as “always.” This finding aligns with Carpenter and Olson (2012), who noted that the use of visual aids, such as pictures, in foreign language vocabulary instruction enhances retention and comprehension compared to reliance on words alone. Pictures support visual learners in recalling the word, its meaning, and contextual usage, thereby improving reading comprehension. These results suggest that teachers favor picture study as a direct approach strategy because pairing visual aids with

vocabulary words facilitates the creation of mental images, reinforcing both retention and understanding. Conversely, the use of signs and symbols, as well as morphological analysis strategies such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words, were less frequently applied, each receiving a mean score of 3.35 (“oftentimes”). While visual-based instruction is clearly valued, integrating morphological strategies more consistently could further enhance vocabulary learning.

For communicative approach activities, role-playing ranked highest among the five indicators, with a mean score of 3.70 (“always”). This finding supports Alabsi (2016), who emphasized that role play provides an enjoyable means for students to practice vocabulary in simulated, authentic contexts. In contrast, symposiums, which involve discussing multiple viewpoints on a given topic, received the lowest mean score of 3.10 (“oftentimes”). Overall, the results suggest that role-playing is an engaging and highly effective communicative strategy for reinforcing vocabulary skills.

In the context of total physical response (TPR) activities, charades received the highest mean score of 3.50 (“always”). In this activity, learners represent words through riddles, pictures, tableaux, or dramatic actions, making it the most commonly used strategy among teachers. Conversely, choral recitation scored lowest, with a mean of 3.35 (“oftentimes”). Choral recitation, where the teacher and class read a text aloud together, can reduce anxiety for struggling readers while encouraging participation. These results indicate that teachers recognize the value of active, game-based strategies such as charades, but consistent use of choral recitation could further support vocabulary development.

Finally, all indicators of audio-lingual approach activities were rated as frequently implemented, with pronunciation drills achieving the highest

mean score of 3.80. Drilling, a longstanding feature of second language classrooms, is supported by Fauzia (2018), who demonstrated that structured drill activities significantly improve immediate vocabulary recall. Pronunciation drills aid in storing vocabulary for long-term retention; however, manipulation of newly learned words in daily conversation received the lowest mean score of 3.55 (“always”). Webb (2007) highlights that a word must typically be used 10 to 16 times before it becomes fully internalized, necessitating a combination of memorization, reading, contextual use, and supplementary activities. Overall, the findings indicate that consistent pronunciation drills are highly effective for strengthening vocabulary skills but should be complemented by activities that promote active use of vocabulary in authentic communication contexts.

Table 3

Learners’ preferred approach in learning vocabulary

| Approach | F | % |
|-------------------------|----------|----------|
| Direct approach | 36 | 32.73% |
| Communicative approach | 28 | 25.45% |
| Total physical response | 24 | 21.81% |
| Audio-lingual approach | 23 | 20.90% |

Table 3 presents the preferred approaches of Grade 8 learners for vocabulary acquisition. The results indicate that 36 out of 110 respondents (32.73%) favored activities associated with the direct approach, citing that these activities facilitate the learning of new words and enhance vocabulary skills. Gabarre et al. (2016) describe the direct approach as a method in which English teachers introduce vocabulary through real objects, emphasize oral interaction and spontaneous language use, and avoid translation between the first and second languages. Repeated exposure to vocabulary in varied contexts strengthens word learning, as learners who

see, hear, and engage with specific words multiple times are more likely to retain them. Teachers who provide extended instruction and promote active engagement create multiple opportunities for students to encounter and use new vocabulary, which, in turn, enhances comprehension and retention when these words are later encountered in reading.

Table 4

Acceptability of game-based vocabulary activity material

| Area | Mean | Interpretation |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Content | 3.82 | Very Satisfactory |
| Format | 3.75 | Very Satisfactory |
| Presentation and organization | 3.45 | Very Satisfactory |
| Accuracy and currency | 3.75 | Very Satisfactory |

Table 4 presents the evaluation ratings of the activity materials by expert evaluators, based on the LRMSD criteria for acceptability. For content acceptability, the materials received an average mean score of 3.82, interpreted as Very Satisfactory and meeting the passing standard under LRMSD guidelines. However, the findings revealed a notable gap: the materials lacked adequate warning or cautionary notes in topics and activities where health and safety could be compromised. This suggests that instructional materials should not only provide knowledge and develop learners’ skills but also explicitly inform students of relevant health and safety protocols. Such considerations are particularly crucial during a pandemic and align with DepEd Order No. 014 s. 2020, which emphasizes that the health and safety of learners, as well as teaching and non-teaching personnel, must be safeguarded at all times.

Regarding format acceptability, the material received an average mean score of 3.75, interpreted as Very Satisfactory and meeting LRMSD standards. Within this dimension, the indicator for print quality, including

letter size, spacing, font style, and overall printing quality, ranked lowest, suggesting that the material did not achieve optimal visual presentation. Proper spacing is essential for text legibility, facilitating the reader's ability to track lines efficiently, while high-quality printing enhances visual appeal and reduces the likelihood of overlooking critical information.

In terms of presentation and organization, the materials obtained an average mean score of 3.45 (Very Satisfactory), also meeting LRMS criteria. However, the indicators for the logical and smooth flow of ideas and sentence length appropriate for the target reader were rated lowest, indicating inconsistencies in sequencing and readability. Matthews and Folivi (2023) note that shorter sentences improve comprehension, whereas longer constructions may hinder it. Ensuring a coherent sequence of lessons and activities promotes deeper understanding and facilitates more effective learning.

For accuracy and currency of information, the materials achieved an average mean score of 3.75 (Very Satisfactory), satisfying LRMS requirements. The most frequently observed issue was the presence of grammatical errors. While such errors may affect comprehension, Alexopoulou (2020) emphasizes that they do not reflect the cognitive abilities or intelligence of second-language learners; rather, they are a natural component of the language acquisition process.

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