

Teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary through games in elementary school

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine teachers' strategies in teaching English vocabulary through games in elementary schools. Vocabulary is an important foundation in language learning, and the use of games is considered capable of making the learning process more interesting and meaningful for students. This study employs a literature review method to analyze various findings related to the application of games in vocabulary learning. The results of the study show that teachers use various games such as flashcards, word-matching games, bingo, guessing games, and role play, which are systematically integrated into the learning process. The use of games helps students understand the meaning of words, improve memory, and use vocabulary in simple communication. In addition, games also increase students' motivation, participation, and confidence. Overall, game-based vocabulary learning is effective in elementary schools if it is well designed and properly managed by teachers.

Keyword: vocabulary learning; educational games; elementary school

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a key medium in the communication process and is an important foundation for individual development. In early childhood, language acquisition is strongly influenced by vocabulary mastery, as vocabulary plays a direct role in a child's ability to express thoughts, understand interlocutors, and establish effective social interactions. Vocabulary is a fundamental element of all language skills because mastery of vocabulary enables individuals to express ideas clearly while supporting receptive skills such as reading and listening. Without adequate vocabulary mastery, the language acquisition process cannot occur optimally. Vocabulary mastery includes understanding meaning, grammatical functions, collocations, connotations, and frequency of use. The broader the vocabulary an individual possesses, the greater their ability to understand information and learn new terms. Therefore, vocabulary becomes the primary foundation in language learning (Fauzana & Bahri, 2025; Loreana et al., 2024).

In learning English, vocabulary plays a highly strategic role as it is the key component in the development of students' language competence. Teaching vocabulary is an essential aspect of foreign language learning, as English proficiency develops alongside the increase in vocabulary mastery. With sufficient vocabulary, students are able to better understand learning materials, communicate effectively, and convey ideas appropriately and engagingly. Furthermore, a rich vocabulary contributes to the enhancement of students' thinking skills (Listyowati & Hidayat, 2022).

Along with the rapid development of globalization, mastery of English as an international language has become an important advantage. English functions as a medium of communication across cultures and nations; thus, its learning has gained increasing attention in many countries, including Indonesia. However, in educational practice in Indonesia, English is generally introduced formally at the secondary school level, while at the elementary level it is often positioned as an additional subject or extracurricular activity. In fact, vocabulary mastery is a crucial foundational element in learning English, especially for elementary school

students who are at the early stage of acquiring a foreign language. Therefore, vocabulary holds a very important position in English language teaching and education (Kurniawan et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025).

In the context of vocabulary learning for early childhood, play-based activities are an effective approach that aligns with the developmental characteristics of children. Through play, children can learn and develop language skills in a fun, interactive, and meaningful environment. Various types of games, such as role play, bingo, storytelling, and word-matching activities, can help children understand and retain vocabulary more easily. The use of games in vocabulary learning enables children to acquire new words, practice them in context, and internalize their meanings through interactive and multisensory experiences (Fauzana & Bahri, 2025). In addition, games can enhance students' interest and motivation to learn, as they incorporate elements of enjoyment, relaxation, and excitement, thereby helping students remember English vocabulary more effectively (Listyowati & Hidayat, 2022).

Based on this explanation, this study is important to describe in depth the strategies used by teachers in teaching English vocabulary through games in elementary schools. The focus of this study includes the types of games used, how games are integrated into the learning process, and teachers' perceptions and experiences during the implementation of game-based vocabulary learning.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a literature review to examine various strategies employed by teachers in teaching English vocabulary through games in elementary school settings. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is not on primary data collection, but on gaining an in-depth understanding of theories, findings, and learning practices that have been discussed in various scientific publications.

This literature study examines academic sources in the form of national and international journal articles, academic books, and online scientific documents that discuss the use of games or game-based techniques as strategies for vocabulary learning at the primary education level. The findings of previous studies indicate that games are an effective strategy for developing students' vocabulary mastery, where teachers utilize games as part of both the material presentation stage and active vocabulary practice in the learning process. Various game techniques, such as flashcards, scrabble, and word games, have contributed to improving vocabulary mastery and increasing student engagement in learning English at the elementary school level. Teachers also apply games as a key strategy alongside the use of visual media, group-based assignments, and interactive activities to help students understand new vocabulary contextually (Pratiwi, 2025; Kurniawan et al., 2025).

The literature collection technique was conducted through searches in scientific databases using keywords such as *teaching vocabulary*, *games in English learning*, *elementary school*, and *teachers' strategies* to identify articles relevant to the focus of the study. The selected sources were then screened based on their relevance to the research objectives and the quality of the publications. Furthermore, the references were categorized according to main themes, such as the types of games used, the characteristics of teaching strategies, and their impact on students' motivation and vocabulary mastery.

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, which involved data reduction to focus on essential information, categorization of findings based on emerging themes from the literature, and synthesis by comparing results from various studies to form a comprehensive understanding of effective teacher strategies in vocabulary learning through games in elementary schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Types of Games Used by Teachers in Vocabulary Learning*

Based on the literature review analyzed in this study, it was found that elementary school teachers use various types of games as the main strategy in teaching English vocabulary. The most commonly used games include flashcards, word-matching games, bingo, simple scrabble, guessing games, and role play. The selection of these games is adjusted to the developmental characteristics of elementary school students, who tend to be active, enjoy visual activities, and require concrete learning experiences.

The use of flashcards is one of the most dominant strategies in vocabulary learning at the elementary school level. Research on the effectiveness of flashcards shows that pictorial visual media can significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery, as it helps them connect word forms with meanings directly and contextually. This media combines visual and verbal stimuli, thereby strengthening students' memory of new words (Syamsiyah & Ma'rifatulloh, 2023).

In addition to flashcards, word-matching games are also widely applied. This technique helps strengthen the association between words and their meanings through activities that involve active student participation. Studies on the development of interactive learning media show that matching pictures with words can increase students' engagement and understanding of new vocabulary, as they learn through hands-on experiences (Indriyani & Yulianto, 2025).

Games such as bingo and simple scrabble are used to train thinking speed and accuracy in recognizing vocabulary. In the context of game-based learning, activities that require quick responses and group collaboration have been shown to improve vocabulary retention and create a more dynamic learning atmosphere. Thus, games are not only entertaining but also contribute to strengthening students' long-term memory (Malakouti et al., 2024).

Role play is also an effective strategy in vocabulary learning. Through this activity, students not only recognize words passively but also use them in simple communication contexts. Research on the use of role play in English learning shows that this strategy can increase students' confidence and help them use vocabulary more authentically. This indicates that vocabulary learning through games can support the development of students' productive skills (Lestari & Sridatun, 2020).

Overall, the variety of games used by teachers reflects an effort to adapt learning to the characteristics of elementary school students, who learn more effectively through fun and interactive activities.

B. Integration of Games in the Learning Stages

The results of the analysis show that teachers do not use games randomly but integrate them systematically into different stages of learning, from introduction to evaluation.

At the introductory stage, simple games such as guessing games are used to attract students' attention and activate prior knowledge. This approach aligns with the concept of game-based learning, which emphasizes creating an engaging initial atmosphere so that students are better prepared to receive the material. At the material presentation stage, teachers use flashcards or visual media to introduce new vocabulary. Studies show that presenting words through images helps students understand meanings more quickly and improve pronunciation through guided repetition (Syamsiyah & Ma'rifatulloh, 2023).

At the practice stage, group-based games such as bingo, word-matching, and simple scrabble are used to reinforce understanding. These activities promote collaboration among students and encourage active participation. Research on interactive media development indicates that collaborative learning activities help students internalize vocabulary through social interaction (Indriyani & Yulianto, 2025).

At the evaluation stage, games can also serve as alternative forms of assessment. Role play, for instance, can be used to measure students' ability to use vocabulary contextually. Findings show that performance-based evaluations such as role play are more effective in reducing student anxiety compared to conventional written tests (Lestari & Sridatun, 2020). Therefore, the integration of games at each learning stage demonstrates that this strategy is part of a structured and systematic instructional design.

C. The Impact of Game Use on Student Motivation and Engagement

The literature review indicates that the use of games in vocabulary learning has a positive impact on students' learning motivation. Monotonous teaching methods tend to reduce students' interest, whereas games create a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment. Research on game-based learning shows that students who learn through games exhibit higher levels of motivation and participation compared to those taught using traditional methods, as games incorporate elements of challenge and healthy competition.

In addition to increasing motivation, games also help reduce anxiety in learning a foreign language. Studies on role play have found that students feel more confident when using English in play-based settings than in formal situations. Thus, games contribute to creating a safer and more supportive learning environment.

The use of flashcards and visual media also contributes to improving students' focus and memory. Previous research shows that the combination of images and words strengthens visual memory, making vocabulary easier to remember and retain.

D. The Role of Teachers in Managing Game-Based Learning

The success of vocabulary learning through games is highly influenced by teachers' competence in classroom management. Teachers need to design activities that align with learning objectives and students' characteristics. Research on teachers' strategies in game-based learning indicates that careful planning, clear instructions, and effective time management are key factors in the successful implementation of this strategy (Indriyani & Yulianto, 2025).

Teachers also act as facilitators and motivators. In game-based learning, teachers not only deliver content but also create a learning environment that supports students' active participation. Studies confirm that the teacher's role is crucial in maintaining a balance between educational objectives and elements of enjoyment in the learning process (Malakouti et al., 2024).

E. Synthesis of Findings and Relevance to English Language Learning in Primary Schools

Based on the overall findings, teaching vocabulary through games is highly relevant to the characteristics of elementary school students. Games not only improve vocabulary mastery but also support the development of speaking and communication skills. Various studies show that game-based learning not only increases the number of vocabulary items learned but also strengthens students' ability to use them contextually.

Furthermore, this approach aligns with 21st-century learning principles that emphasize collaboration, creativity, and communication. Through games, students learn to collaborate, think actively, and build confidence in using English. However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on the teacher's ability to design structured learning activities. Without proper planning, games may lose their academic focus. Therefore, teachers' understanding of learning objectives is a key factor in ensuring the success of this strategy.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the reviewed studies, it can be concluded that the use of games in teaching English vocabulary in elementary schools is an effective approach that aligns with students' developmental characteristics. Various games such as flashcards, word-matching games, bingo, simple scrabble, guessing games, and role play help students understand word meanings, strengthen memory, and apply vocabulary in simple communicative contexts.

The structured integration of games at each stage of learning, from introduction to evaluation, has a positive impact on students' motivation, participation, and confidence. Moreover, a fun and engaging learning environment helps reduce students' anxiety when using English.

However, the effectiveness of this strategy largely depends on teachers' readiness and ability to design learning activities that align with instructional objectives. With proper planning and implementation, game-based vocabulary learning can serve as an effective solution for improving elementary school students' English language skills.

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