

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF USING GAME-BASED LEARNING TO ENHANCE ENGLISH VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

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Abstract : Mastery of English vocabulary is a crucial foundation for developing proficiency in the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, traditional methods often fail to engage learners effectively, especially in a digital era marked by rapid technological advancement. Game-Based Learning (GBL) emerges as a promising strategy that integrates interactive, enjoyable, and feedback-rich environments into the learning process. This study investigates students' perceptions of GBL in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among 13 sixth-semester students of the English Education Program at Silampari University. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire. Findings reveal that most students perceive GBL as highly motivational and effective in fostering vocabulary understanding, interactivity, and enthusiasm. Despite the positive responses, concerns remain regarding vocabulary retention and confidence, highlighting the need for complementary reinforcement methods. The study concludes with recommendations for integrating GBL with structured practices and encourages future research exploring its long-term impact across diverse educational contexts.

Keyword: Game-Based Learning (GBL); Vocabulary_Acquisition; Students' Perspective; Teaching Strategy;

BACKGROUND

The growing importance of English as an international language has made vocabulary acquisition a crucial component of English language learning (Nation, 2022). Vocabulary knowledge is often recognized as the foundation for the development of other language skills, such as reading comprehension, writing proficiency, listening, and speaking fluency. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to communicate effectively and to comprehend even the simplest texts (Webb & Nation, 2017). Despite its recognized importance, traditional

vocabulary teaching methods often remain rote and disengaging, relying on memorization and repetitive drilling that can reduce learner motivation and limit retention (Alemi & Sadehvandi, 2021).

In recent years, technological advances and shifts in educational paradigms have encouraged teachers to seek more interactive, student-centered approaches to teaching vocabulary. One prominent innovation in this domain is the use of game-based learning (GBL), which leverages the motivational power of games to promote active engagement, deeper processing, and improved learning outcomes (Kim et al., 2022). Game-based learning can be digital or analog, competitive or collaborative, and designed for individual or group work. Its flexibility has made it increasingly popular across educational levels and contexts.

Game-based learning in language education combines pedagogical goals with game elements such as competition, rules, challenges, rewards, and storytelling. By integrating these elements, educators aim to foster intrinsic motivation, sustain attention, and encourage repeated exposure to target vocabulary in meaningful contexts (Huang et al., 2020). Unlike traditional drills, games typically create low-stress environments that reduce learners' affective filters and support risk-taking, which is essential in second-language acquisition.

Research has shown that games can provide rich, contextualized input, repeated practice opportunities, and immediate feedback—all of which are key factors in successful vocabulary learning (Webb, 2020). Moreover, games often promote collaborative learning and social interaction, allowing learners to negotiate meaning, correct each other's errors, and build shared understanding (Zhang & Chu, 2021). In digital contexts, games may include adaptive features that personalize learning, track progress, and enhance accessibility.

Educational games designed for vocabulary acquisition may include traditional word games, digital apps, online quiz platforms, and role-playing scenarios. For example, popular tools such as Kahoot!, Quizlet, and Duolingo incorporate game elements to make vocabulary learning more engaging and effective. These innovations align with broader pedagogical trends toward constructivist and communicative approaches that emphasize learner agency and authentic language use.

Numerous studies have explored the effectiveness of game-based learning for vocabulary acquisition. For instance, Derakhshan and Zohdi (2021) found that digital games significantly improved Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary retention and motivation compared to conventional teaching methods. Similarly, Wang and Tahir (2020) conducted a systematic review of Kahoot!-based learning and concluded that it generally had a positive impact on student engagement and vocabulary outcomes. Other studies have highlighted the social dimension of GBL. Huang et al. (2020) observed that collaborative digital games encouraged peer interaction and negotiation of meaning, leading to deeper processing of vocabulary items. In addition, game-based approaches have been shown to support differentiated learning, offering personalized feedback and pacing that accommodate diverse learner needs (Kim et al., 2022).

There is also evidence that game-based learning can support vocabulary development in younger learners. A study by Hsu et al. (2021) demonstrated that primary school students who used a vocabulary-learning app with game elements outperformed their peers in post-tests and reported higher levels of enjoyment. The authors suggested that enjoyment and sustained engagement were critical mediators of learning outcomes.

Despite these positive findings, researchers have also identified challenges. These include the risk of distraction, technical difficulties, and the need for careful integration of games into broader pedagogical plans (Zhang & Chu, 2021). Teachers' attitudes and digital literacy can also affect the success of game-based approaches, with some educators remaining skeptical of their value or unsure how to implement them effectively.

While there is a growing body of evidence supporting game-based learning for vocabulary acquisition, much of this research has focused on measurable learning outcomes such as test scores or retention rates. Fewer studies have examined learners' subjective perceptions of using games for vocabulary learning, particularly in specific cultural and educational contexts. Student perceptions are critical because they shape engagement, motivation, and ultimately learning effectiveness.

Moreover, much existing research is concentrated in specific regions, such as East Asia or the Middle East, and there is limited exploration of diverse educational contexts that may feature different technological access, curricular priorities, and cultural attitudes toward games (Kim et al., 2022). In addition, many studies focus on young learners or university students, leaving

a gap in understanding how other learner groups perceive and experience game-based vocabulary learning.

Furthermore, previous research often treats games as a uniform intervention, without exploring how different game types, designs, or implementation strategies affect student perceptions. Understanding these nuances is important for informing effective, contextually appropriate instructional design.

Given these gaps, this study aims to investigate student perceptions of using game-based learning to enhance English vocabulary acquisition. By examining learners' subjective experiences, attitudes, and evaluations of game-based activities, the research seeks to complement existing outcome-based studies and provide a fuller picture of the role of games in vocabulary learning. Specifically, the study will explore how students perceive the effectiveness, enjoyment, challenges, and motivational impact of game-based vocabulary learning. It will also consider contextual factors that shape these perceptions, such as prior experience with games, technological access, and cultural attitudes toward educational innovation.

This research offers several important contributions. First, it enriches the literature on game-based language learning by centering students' voices and experiences, which are often overlooked in favor of test-based outcomes. By investigating student perceptions, the study can reveal barriers to engagement, potential sources of motivation, and practical considerations for implementation.

Second, the research provides insights for educators seeking to integrate game-based learning into vocabulary instruction. Understanding how students experience and evaluate these activities can inform pedagogical design, helping teachers select or adapt games that maximize engagement and learning.

Third, the study contributes to broader discussions about learner-centered education and innovation in English language teaching. In an era when digital learning and educational technology are rapidly evolving, it is essential to understand not just whether new tools “work” in a narrow sense, but how they are perceived and experienced by learners in diverse contexts (Derakhshan & Zohdi, 2021; Kim et al., 2022).

Finally, the study addresses the need for context-sensitive research in language education. By focusing on student perceptions within a particular educational and cultural setting, it highlights

the importance of adapting game-based learning to local realities rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach.

Through these contributions, this research aims to support more effective, engaging, and learner-centered approaches to English vocabulary instruction in a globalized and increasingly digital educational landscape.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions regarding implementing Game-Based Learning (GBL) in enhancing English vocabulary mastery. The population of this research consists of all 6th-semester students in the English Education Study Program at Silampari University (Class of 2024).

The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, a non-probability method that selects participants based on specific criteria—namely, students who are actively enrolled in the 6th semester. 13 students were selected from this population, representing approximately 50% of the total number of 6th-semester students. This selection ensures that the sample is both relevant and manageable while capturing diverse student perceptions.

The main instrument used in this research is a researcher-designed questionnaire. It consists of closed-ended questions presented on a Likert scale, with five response options: *strongly agree*, *strongly Agree*, *Neutral*, *Disagree*, and *Strongly Disagree*. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, allowing participants to complete it at their convenience while ensuring efficient data collection.

FINDINGS

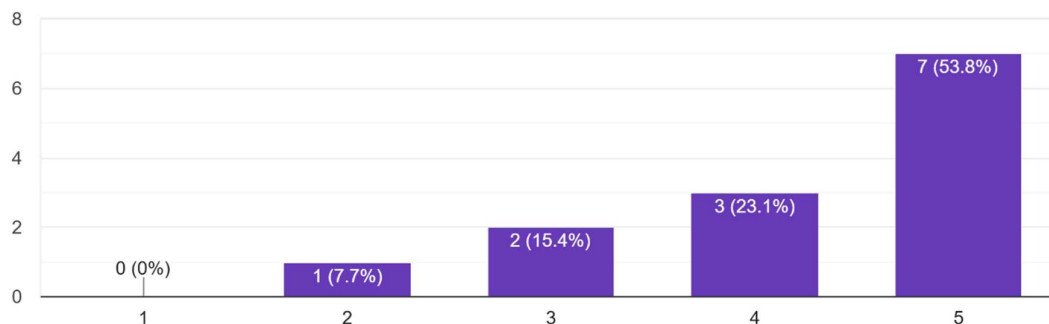
Result

Quantitative Result:

Diagram 1 Question No.1

1. Pembelajaran menggunakan game membuat saya lebih termotivasi untuk belajar kosakata bahasa Inggris.

13 responses

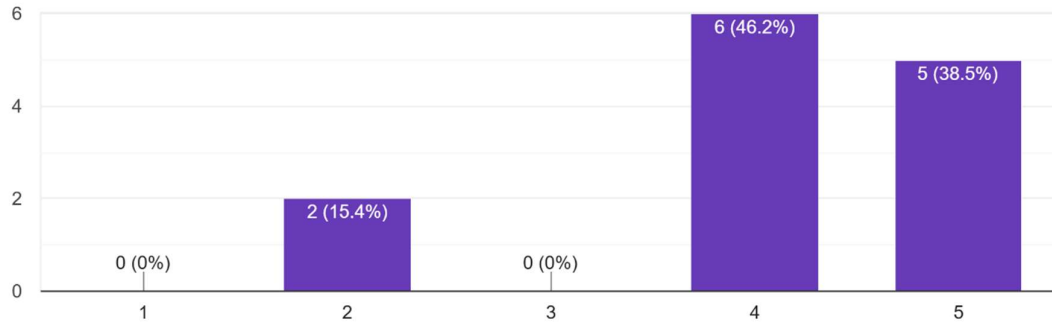


Based on the diagram for the statement “Learning through games makes me more motivated to study English vocabulary.”, were overwhelmingly positive. Out of the 13 respondents, 7 students (53.8%) selected *Strongly Agree*, while 3 students (23.1%) chose *Agree*. Additionally, 2 students (15.4%) responded *Neutral*, and only 1 student (7.7%) chose *Disagree*. No respondents selected *Strongly Disagree*. These results indicate that the majority of students feel that game-based learning (GBL) significantly boosts their motivation in studying English vocabulary. This aligns with existing literature that highlights the motivational benefits of games in educational settings. Games introduce elements of fun, challenge, and reward that help break the monotony of traditional instruction, making students more enthusiastic and driven to participate in vocabulary lessons.

Diagram 2 Question No.2

2. Saya merasa lebih antusias ketika belajar menggunakan media game dibanding metode tradisional.

13 responses

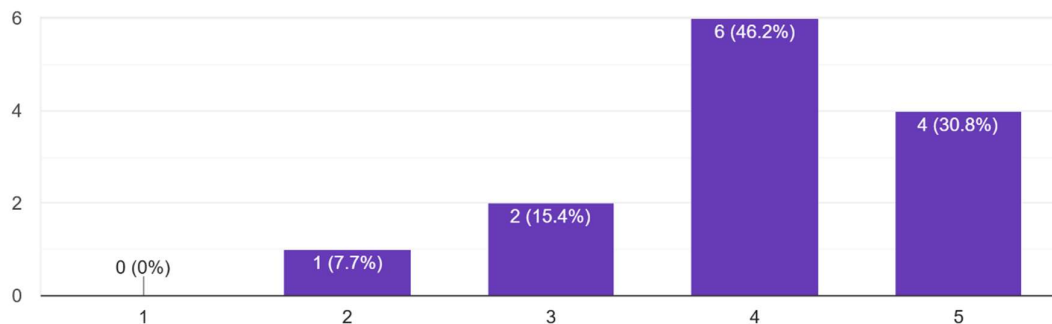


Based on the diagram for the statement “I feel more enthusiastic when learning through games compared to traditional methods.” show that a large portion of students favor game-based learning over conventional methods. 5 respondents (38.5%) selected *Strongly Agree* and 6 students (46.2%) chose *Agree*, indicating that most participants experienced greater enthusiasm when games were used as a learning medium. However, 2 students (15.4%) *Disagreed*, and no respondents chose *Neutral* or *Strongly Disagree*. These results suggest that GBL has a positive emotional impact, fostering a sense of excitement and novelty that is often absent in lecture-based or textbook-centered approaches. The increase in enthusiasm can lead to improved attention, greater willingness to practice, and deeper engagement with learning materials.

Diagram 3 Question No.3

3. Game-based learning meningkatkan keterlibatan saya dalam proses belajar.

13 responses

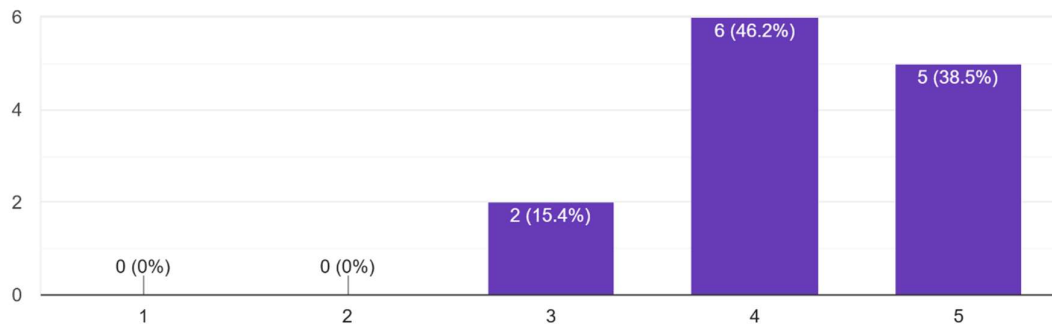


Based on the diagram, Student responses indicate that GBL is highly effective in promoting classroom engagement. 4 students (30.8%) *Strongly Agreed*, while 6 students (46.2%) *Agreed* that games helped them stay involved during lessons. In contrast, 2 students (15.4%) chose *Neutral*, and 1 student (7.7%) selected *Disagree*. These figures show that most learners felt more connected and actively involved when games were integrated into their vocabulary learning. Engagement is a critical factor in successful language acquisition, and the interactive nature of games encourages participation, peer collaboration, and focused practice. These dynamics may explain why students report a stronger sense of involvement during GBL sessions compared to traditional approaches.

Diagram 4 Question No.4

4. Penggunaan game membantu saya memahami kosakata baru dengan lebih mudah.

13 responses

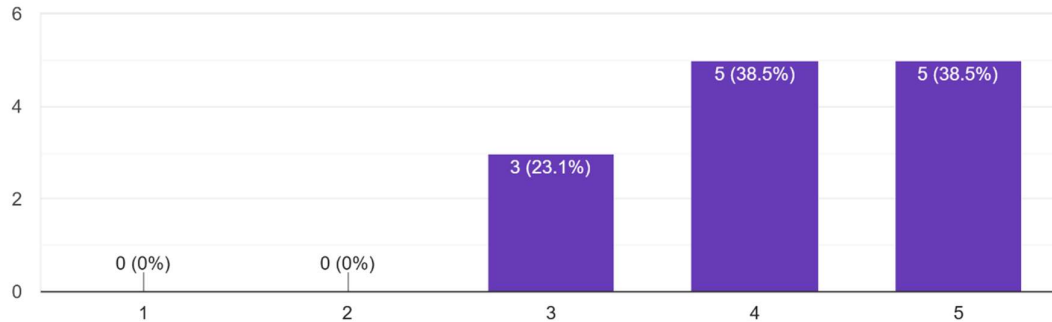


Based on the diagram, This statement received strong support, with 5 students (38.5%) *Strongly Agreeing* and 6 students (46.2%) *Agreeing*. The remaining 2 students (15.4%) selected *Neutral*, with no disagreement recorded. This suggests that GBL supports vocabulary comprehension by presenting words in meaningful and contextualized ways. Games often involve repetition, real-time usage, and visual or situational cues, all of which facilitate better understanding. These strategies align with the principles of contextualized learning, where students derive meaning from authentic scenarios rather than isolated word memorization. As such, GBL appears to function as a bridge between passive vocabulary exposure and active, meaningful use.

Diagram 5 Question No.5

5. Saya lebih mudah mengingat kosakata jika belajar menggunakan permainan.

13 responses

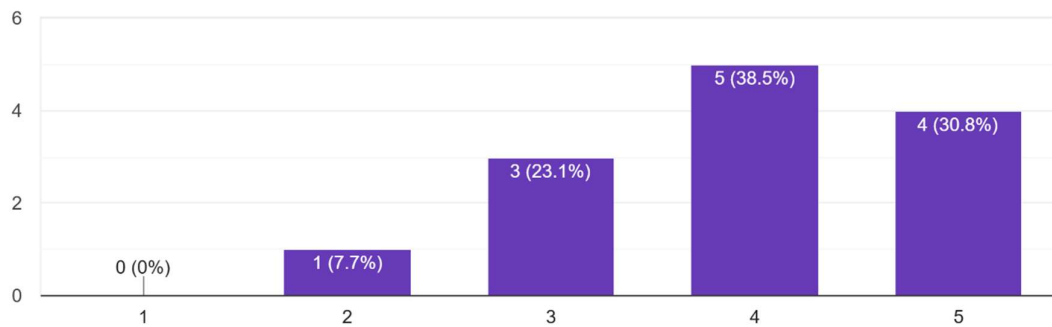


Based on the diagram for the statement, “I find it easier to remember vocabulary when learning through games.”, overall perceptions were positive, responses to this item revealed slightly more variation. 4 respondents (30.8%) *Strongly Agreed*, and 4 others (30.8%) *Agreed*. 3 students (23.1%) were *Neutral*, and 2 students (15.4%) selected *Disagree*. These findings suggest that a majority of students perceive GBL as helpful for vocabulary retention, but some students may not experience the same benefit. Memory-related outcomes in language learning can depend on factors such as frequency of exposure, individual learning styles, and the type of game used. Despite the variation, the fact that 61.6% of students agreed or strongly agreed supports the conclusion that GBL can be an effective memory aid for many learners.

Diagram 6 Question No.6

6. Game edukatif membantu saya memperluas kosakata dalam konteks yang menyenangkan.

13 responses

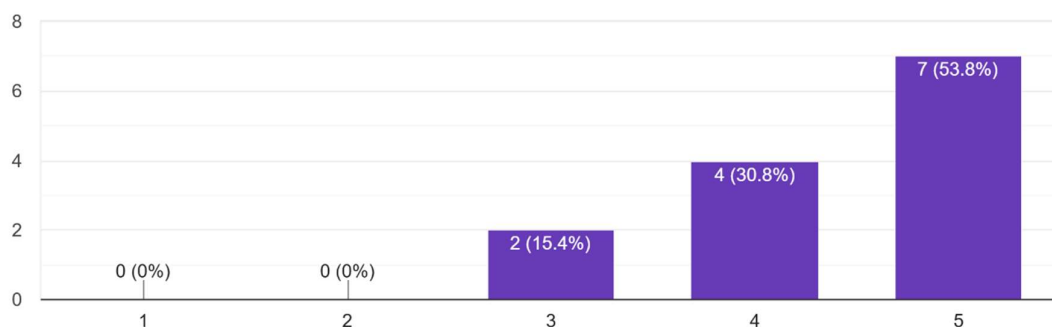


Based on the diagram, The responses to this statement were mostly favorable, with 4 students (30.8%) indicating *Strongly Agree* and 6 students (46.2%) selecting *Agree*. 3 students (23.1%) remained *Neutral*, and there were no negative responses. These results underscore the dual benefit of GBL: vocabulary expansion and learner enjoyment. When learning is embedded in a fun and low-stress environment, students are more likely to explore new words, take risks in usage, and internalize vocabulary through repeated exposure. This perception supports the idea that enjoyment and engagement are not just supplementary benefits of games, but essential conditions for deeper and more lasting language acquisition.

Diagram 7 Question No.7

7. Media game memberikan pengalaman belajar yang lebih interaktif dibanding metode ceramah.

13 responses



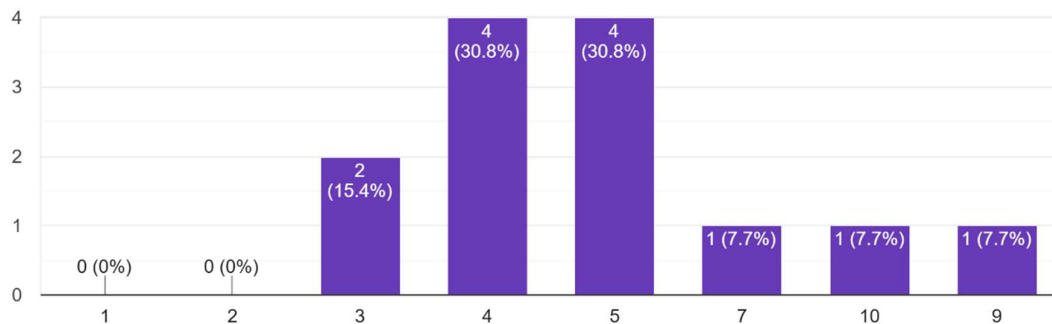
Based on the diagram for the statement “Game media provides a more interactive learning experience compared to lecture-based methods.”, The responses to this statement indicate a strong preference for interactive learning facilitated by games. Out of 13 students, 5 respondents (38.5%) *Strongly Agreed* and 5 respondents (38.5%) *Agreed*, showing that a majority of students believe games

create a more engaging and participatory learning environment. The remaining 3 students (23.1%) selected *Neutral*, while none expressed disagreement. These results highlight that students perceive game-based activities as a dynamic alternative to conventional lecture methods, which are often passive in nature. The interactive nature of games appears to enhance not only participation but also attention and interest in vocabulary-related content. This finding supports the use of GBL as a student-centered strategy that transforms learning into a more immersive and enjoyable experience.

Diagram 8 Question No.8

8. Saya merasa lebih percaya diri menggunakan kosakata yang saya pelajari melalui game.

13 responses

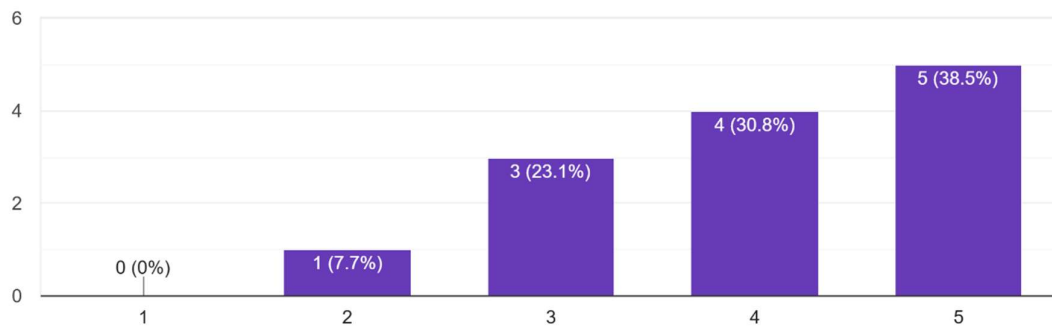


The results for this statement were slightly mixed but still generally positive. 4 students (30.8%) *Strongly Agreed*, 3 students (23.1%) *Agreed*, and 2 students (15.4%) chose *Neutral*. However, 2 respondents (15.4%) *Disagreed*, and 2 others (15.4%) *Strongly Disagreed*. This distribution suggests that while a portion of students gained confidence through GBL, some did not feel the same benefit. The variance may reflect individual differences in learning styles, exposure to the games used, or personal comfort with applying vocabulary in active communication. Nonetheless, the fact that a majority still leaned toward positive responses suggests that game-based vocabulary practice has the potential to build learner confidence, especially when integrated with supportive classroom activities and feedback mechanisms.

Diagram 9 Question No.9

9. Game-based learning memberikan umpan balik langsung yang membantu saya belajar lebih baik.

13 responses

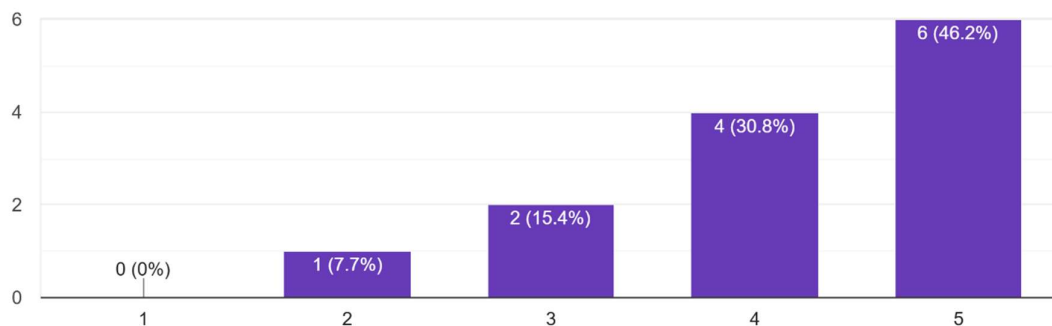


A large majority of respondents supported the value of immediate feedback in games. Specifically, 5 students (38.5%) *Strongly Agreed*, 6 students (46.2%) *Agreed*, and 2 students (15.4%) chose *Neutral*. No students *Disagreed* or *Strongly Disagreed*. These findings highlight the importance of timely feedback in the learning process. In game-based environments, students often receive instant responses to their actions, whether correct or incorrect, which reinforces learning in real-time. The high level of agreement in this item underscores how students benefit from the clarity and consistency of in-game feedback. This also suggests that the use of digital platforms or structured game tasks that include built-in corrective feedback may enhance vocabulary retention and student autonomy in the learning process.

Diagram 10 Question No.10

10. Akses terhadap media game edukatif cukup mudah bagi saya sebagai mahasiswa.

13 responses



The responses to this final item were largely positive, with 5 students (38.5%) selecting *Strongly Agree* and 6 students (46.2%) choosing *Agree*. Additionally, 2 students (15.4%) responded *Neutral*, and none selected *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree*. This widespread agreement underscores the

perceived overall effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL) as a strategy for enhancing vocabulary acquisition. Students recognize that beyond being enjoyable, games contribute meaningfully to learning outcomes. This may be attributed to the combination of repeated exposure, contextual learning, and student engagement provided by GBL. As such, the data support the integration of game-based methods as a core complement to traditional vocabulary instruction.

Table1. Average Score of Students' Responses.

No.	Statement	Average Score
1	Motivated by game-based learning	4.46
2	More enthusiastic than traditional methods	4.08
3	Increased engagement	4.0
4	Easier vocabulary understanding	4.24
5	Easier vocabulary retention	3.77
6	Vocabulary expansion in fun context	4.08
7	More interactive than lectures	4.38
8	Increased confidence using vocabulary	3.62
9	Immediate feedback helps learning	4.24
10	Easy access to game media	4.24

The study found that students generally have positive perceptions of using Game-Based Learning (GBL) to enhance English vocabulary acquisition. The highest agreement was with the statement "Motivated by game-based learning," which indicates that games are highly motivational tools that enhance engagement with vocabulary learning. The study also found that game-based learning fosters more interactive classroom experiences than traditional lecture-based instruction. Students appreciate the immediate feedback provided by games, which aids in quicker error correction and reinforces learning effectively. The ease of access to game media supports regular engagement and practice, and vocabulary expansion in fun contexts is appreciated. However, there is a slight variation in student enthusiasm levels, with some students finding games beneficial for active involvement in lessons. The study suggests that games need to incorporate additional repetition and structured practice opportunities to improve memory retention.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide insightful implications regarding the application of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in vocabulary acquisition among university students. Overall, students expressed strong approval for GBL, highlighting its motivational aspects, interactivity, and immediate feedback mechanisms. These elements collectively enhance the learning experience by maintaining student interest, engagement, and enthusiasm, which are vital for successful language learning. However, the results also reveal some critical points for educators to consider. While the general reception of GBL is positive, there is notable variability in student responses, especially regarding vocabulary retention and confidence in vocabulary usage. The moderate scores on these points suggest that while games are effective in introducing vocabulary and making learning enjoyable, they may not

fully support long-term retention or practical application without additional reinforcement strategies. To address these concerns, educators should consider integrating supplementary instructional methods alongside game-based activities. Strategies might include spaced repetition techniques, structured practice exercises, and opportunities for authentic language use in practical communication tasks. This integrated approach could strengthen vocabulary retention and boost learner confidence.

Moreover, the study underscores the necessity of ensuring easy accessibility and reliable technological infrastructure to facilitate regular and effective use of GBL. The positive perceptions of accessibility indicate that most students currently face minimal challenges in accessing games; however, continuous evaluation and improvement of technological resources remain essential to maintain this advantage. In sum, while the study strongly supports the use of game-based learning to enhance English vocabulary acquisition, educators should remain mindful of individual learner differences and the need for diversified teaching strategies. Combining the motivational and interactive benefits of games with targeted reinforcement practices will likely yield the most effective outcomes in language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Game-Based Learning (GBL) significantly enhances student motivation, interactivity, and immediate feedback in vocabulary acquisition. The findings support the integration of GBL into English vocabulary learning contexts, emphasizing its role in increasing student enthusiasm and engagement. Nonetheless, challenges related to vocabulary retention and student confidence were also identified, suggesting that a comprehensive approach combining interactive gaming elements with structured instructional reinforcement is necessary for optimal outcomes.

Future educational strategies should incorporate diverse, supplementary methods such as spaced repetition, structured exercises, and authentic communication practices to address these identified challenges effectively. Additionally, continuous evaluation and improvement of technological accessibility are critical to sustain and maximize the effectiveness of GBL. Further research is encouraged to explore individual learner differences and develop tailored approaches to enhance vocabulary learning outcomes through game-based methods.

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