



## EXPLORING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF USING THE “GAMESTOLEARNENGLISH” WEB GAME FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING

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### Abstract

This study investigates elementary school students' perceptions of the web-based game “*gamestolearnenglish*” for vocabulary learning. The game is intended to improve vocabulary utilization, motivation, and engagement by including gamification elements. Using a qualitative study, the data was collected through interviews and observations with five fifth-grade students in Surabaya who utilized the game during English learning sessions. The results indicate that the interactive features of the game significantly enhanced student motivation and facilitated an enjoyable learning experience. On the other hand, difficulties such as inadequate material variety and technological problems associated with internet connectivity were found. The game can become a more efficient tool for learning vocabulary if developed further. This study offers valuable insights for teachers and developers of digital learning tools, enabling them to design more engaging and efficient student learning experiences.

**Keywords:** vocabulary learning, gamification, web-based games, student perceptions, digital learning

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### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is fundamental to all linguistic competencies (Astika, 2016), facilitating the articulation of ideas and enhancing clarity in reading and listening. Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary is crucial for language competency and development, as acquiring a language is unattainable without a functional vocabulary (Katemba, 2022). Mastering vocabulary requires understanding meanings, grammatical functions, collocations, connotations, and frequency of usage (Thornbury, 2002). Students with inadequate vocabulary struggle to comprehend meanings and respond effectively (Clark, 2013; Slattery & Willis, 2001). A comprehensive vocabulary enhances comprehension and aids in acquiring new terminology, forming the foundation for language acquisition (Bai, 2018). Thus, educational resources are essential for English vocabulary instruction.

Integrating technology into vocabulary learning makes language acquisition more engaging. Online language games are entertainment and educational tools (Amir, H. S., Rustam & Hasyim, 2023); Shabrina & Taufiq, 2023). Research indicates that games enhance learning (Gunel & Top, 2022), and educators should employ creative strategies to maintain student interest. Teachers must select instructional methods that foster enjoyment and engagement, making games a highly effective approach (Amanda, Nadrun & Wahyudin, 2023). Using web-based games like "*gamestolearnenglish*" aligns with the digital preferences of modern learners, enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

Interactive digital games provide numerous advantages by engaging students and making learning enjoyable (Chen, Liu, & Huang, 2019). These games promote critical thinking and problem-solving, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life contexts. Adaptive technologies ensure personalized learning experiences, enabling students to progress at their own pace (Ashraf, Motlagh, & Salami, 2014; Chen et al., 2019; Li, 2021). Various studies highlight the effectiveness of digital games in vocabulary development (Adkins, 2004), reinforcing their role in language acquisition.

Research on game-based vocabulary learning reveals that the "*PowPow*" game increases students' enthusiasm for learning English, aiding vocabulary expansion (Hazar, 2020). Similarly, Quizizz has proven effective in improving students' vocabulary comprehension, participation, and enjoyment (Loucky, 1998; Pratiwi et al., 2022). Another study demonstrated that "*OnVac*," a web-based learning game, helped students acquire specialized vocabulary (Ali Z et al., 2022; Martin, J. 2004). These findings support the integration of digital games into vocabulary instruction, particularly for elementary school students. This study investigates the impact of "*gamestolearnenglish*" on elementary students' vocabulary learning, examining their perceptions, implementation, and challenges. The research is limited to elementary students in Surabaya, and findings may not be generalizable. The study's significance lies in its contribution to vocabulary learning theories and practical applications (Hasram et al., 2021; Martin, 2004)), providing insights for educators and future research into digital platforms for academic vocabulary learning (Astika, I. G. (2016). Additionally, it seeks to collect firsthand data from elementary school students who have engaged with the "*gamestolearnenglish*" web game to ascertain the difficulties that the web game presents for the vocabulary learning of elementary school students (Mukoroli, 2011).

## **METHOD**

The study employs a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2018), focusing on participants' learning experiences rather than solely relying on existing literature. The research utilizes a case study approach to understand students' perceptions of the "*gamestolearnenglish*" web game for vocabulary learning. The case study design demonstrated cause and effect by examining the impact in real-life circumstances (Leavy, 2014; Yin, 2018), considering that context plays a vital role in both causes and effects (Mohamed, 2021). This method allows an in-depth understanding of the impact of digital tools in real-life educational settings. As technology reshapes education, investigating how students and teachers use this web game is crucial for enhancing vocabulary learning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research occurs at a private elementary school known for its quality English instruction. The participants included five fifth-grade students and one English teacher who used the "*gamestolearnenglish*" web game for two years. The students were selected based on their motivation to expand their vocabulary and prior web game experience. The process is carried out after the study's setting is established. Furthermore, the selected students meet

particular criteria (Dewi & Sari, 2023). First, these students aimed to expand their vocabulary while teaching and learning English (Uyen, 2023). Second, the students participated in a lesson led by an English teacher who had previously used the "gamestolearnenglish" web game for two years. Third, they had experience acquiring academic terminology through the "gamestolearnenglish" web game. Their perspectives provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of digital learning tools in language acquisition.

The researcher acts as a non-participant observer, remaining seated at the back and not engaging in the teaching and learning activities. During the observation, the researcher will record detailed notes on all teacher and student activities, specifically students implementing the "gamestolearnenglish" web game. An observation checklist and field notes will enhance the observation process. The study gathers responses from students regarding their experiences and challenges with the web game. Observations are conducted with a non-participant approach, supplemented by field notes and video recordings to ensure accuracy. The interview was done after the classroom observation. Semi-structured interviews are used to obtain detailed perspectives, allowing flexibility in questioning while maintaining structured guidelines. The interviews are conducted in Indonesian to facilitate free expression and are recorded for detailed analysis.

The qualitative data analysis follows Creswell's framework (2016). The process begins with raw data collection through classroom observations and interviews. The researcher then organizes and prepares the data by categorizing it based on research questions. A thorough reading of the data helps in understanding general themes. Coding is applied to classify responses systematically, using symbols to distinguish perspectives (Saldana, 2016). The interrelation of themes is examined through relevant theoretical frameworks, leading to the final stage of interpretation, where findings are discussed in connection with prior research. This structured approach ensures comprehensive analysis and meaningful conclusions about the role of digital games in vocabulary learning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings focus on students' perceptions of the "gamestolearnenglish" web game, its classroom implementation, and vocabulary learning challenges. The discussion interprets the results to highlight the study's objectives.

### Students' Perceptions of "gamestolearnenglish"

Classroom observations and interviews revealed that most students were enthusiastic about using the "gamestolearnenglish" web game (Octaberlina & Rofiki, 2021). The tool contributed to vocabulary learning through increased engagement and motivation, a positive perception of its effectiveness, and its advantages over traditional methods.

### Engagement and Motivation

The interactive features of the game significantly boosted students' motivation and engagement in learning vocabulary. Students enjoyed the challenge the game presented, making learning more exciting (Yudha & Mandasari, 2021). According to the interviews, students were enthusiastic about the game's challenge. *"The game makes learning a challenge, so I'm more excited to learn," Participant 1 said.* The gamified structure turned a conventional learning task into an engaging experience, and the repetitive activities and expressive imagery improved vocabulary retention. *Participant 3 stated, "The game's repetition and images give me a more effective way to recall words."* These findings align

with Landers' (2014) Gamified Learning Theory, which suggests that gamification enhances learning by increasing motivation and engagement.

### **Perception of Effectiveness**

Students found the game effective for memorizing vocabulary, as its playful nature reduced stress compared to traditional methods. The game helped them retain words longer by making learning feel like play rather than study. *Participant 2 stated, "The game facilitates my memory of words for a longer period because it resembles a game rather than a study."* Classroom observations confirmed that students remained focused and enthusiastic throughout the activities. This finding supports research by Dastjerdi, H. V., & Rezvani, E. (2022), which suggests that gamification enhances student engagement and enthusiasm for vocabulary learning.

### **Comparative Advantage**

Students highlighted that the gamified approach sustained their interest more effectively than traditional vocabulary learning. *Participant 4 stated, "While playing the game, I am more motivated to study." "I am easily bored without it."* Many found the game motivating, preventing boredom and making studying more enjoyable. These results align with Pratiwi et al. (2022), who emphasized that game-based tools like Quizizz positively impact student motivation and participation. *Participant 5, for instance, stated, "This game provides an innovative approach to retention of vocabulary and enhances the enjoyment of studying."* Several students credited the game's design for improving their vocabulary retention and making studying more enjoyable, reinforcing the benefits of gamified learning.

### **Implementation Practices**

Integrating the "gamestolearnenglish" web game in the classroom revealed key implementation practices. Observations showed that the game was user-friendly and accessible, encouraging student engagement and participation. The following aspects characterized the implementation process:

#### **Ease of Access and Usage**

Students found the web game easy to use, quickly following instructions and navigating the platform without difficulty. The platform's intuitive design allowed immediate engagement, as seen when students began playing as soon as the teacher introduced it. *The platform's user-friendly design was evident when students such as Participant 1 had already started playing the game when the teacher instructed the class to access it.* This ease of use supports Chen et al.'s (2019) assertion that educational tools should be user-friendly to enhance student participation. The game also minimized anxiety related to technology use, allowing students to focus on learning rather than struggling with the tool.

#### **Collaborative Learning**

Gameplay encouraged peer interactions, fostering collaborative learning. Students worked together to solve puzzles and interpret vocabulary, demonstrating teamwork. Participant feedback indicated that discussing game clues with peers helped reinforce their understanding. *Participant 5 observed that peer collaboration was essential for interpreting clues and matching vocabulary.* This aligns with Sahensolar & Marpaung (2024), which emphasizes that learning is cognitive and social. Collaborative learning environments allow students to share insights and support each other's comprehension, reinforcing vocabulary retention.

## Critical Thinking

The game also promoted critical thinking by requiring students to interpret visual clues and contextual information to determine word meanings. For instance, students deduced that "transportation" was represented by a moped in the game. This aligns with Pratiwi et al. (2022), who found that gamified tools enhance cognitive processing in vocabulary learning. The game encouraged higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis and evaluation, supporting long-term vocabulary retention. This is consistent with Landers' (2014) Gamified Learning Theory, which suggests task engagement improves cognitive and behavioural learning outcomes.

## Challenges Encountered

The "gamestolearnenglish" web game faced several challenges, including a steep learning curve, technical issues, and limited content variety. These obstacles affected student engagement and learning experiences. The following sections discuss these challenges and propose solutions to improve the game's effectiveness in the classroom.

### Technical Difficulties

Technical issues, particularly unstable internet connectivity, hindered the game's functionality and disrupted the learning experience. For instance, slow internet caused unexpected interruptions in gameplay, as noted by Participant 1. *Participant 1 noted, "The internet is occasionally slow, causing the game to stop in the middle suddenly."* These difficulties align with previous studies emphasizing the need for a stable digital learning infrastructure. Such challenges can be incredibly discouraging for students in resource-limited settings. Institutions should improve internet infrastructure or offer offline game versions to address this. Implementing these adaptations can create a more inclusive learning environment, ensuring students focus on content rather than technical disruptions.

### Initial Learning Curve

Many students struggled with understanding the game's rules and navigation at first. Participant 2 mentioned confusion due to the variety of vocabulary games available. According to Participant 2, *"I was somewhat perplexed by the regulations, as there are numerous varieties of vocabulary games."* This finding is supported by research highlighting the need for an adjustment period when using digital learning tools. To ease this transition, incorporating clear tutorials or step-by-step instructions in students' native languages could be beneficial. Providing interactive and accessible guidance can enhance comprehension while keeping students engaged.

### Limited Content Variety

Some students found the game repetitive, which reduced their engagement. Participant 5 pointed out that additional challenges would make the game more interesting. *Participant 5 emphasized, "The game can be monotonous sometimes, and I would appreciate additional challenges."* This aligns with research stressing the importance of novelty in gamified learning. To address this, educators and developers should introduce more diverse activities and progressively challenging levels. Adding thematic lessons and seasonal updates could make the learning experience more dynamic and relatable to students' interests.

## **Discussion**

The findings indicate that the "gamestolearnenglish" web game is adequate for vocabulary learning due to its interactive nature. However, improvements are needed to maximize its educational impact.

### **Alignment with Gamified Learning Theory**

The study supports Landers' (2014) gamified learning theory, which suggests that game elements like challenges, feedback, and rewards enhance student motivation. The game transformed vocabulary learning into an engaging challenge rather than a routine task, motivating students to persist (Esa, Hashim, & Jamal, 2021). Features such as progress tracking and point systems helped students focus on their goals. The interactive design, including visual cues and instant feedback, allowed learners to take control of their educational experience. This engagement is essential for effective learning, as it encourages students to remain active and put in effort to improve vocabulary retention.

Furthermore, the study confirms that gamified learning enhances engagement and behavioural learning outcomes. For instance, students reported that the challenges they encountered in the game motivated them to learn, as it represented learning new vocabulary as a challenge to overcome rather than a monotonous task. In addition, the results prove the concept that gamified learning improves behavioural learning outcomes in addition to engagement. The game motivated students to continue learning vocabulary, even in adversity, by integrating game-based concepts, including progression and levels. Students expressed enthusiasm for the competition and challenge, motivating them to improve. The competitive and goal-oriented structure of the game encouraged students to push themselves, demonstrating how gamification fosters persistence, active participation, and risk-taking. These findings support Landers' theory by showing that gamified learning environments create enjoyable and effective educational experiences, leading to better academic performance.

### **Enhancement of Critical Thinking and Collaboration**

The "gamestolearnenglish" web game aligns with cognitive learning theories, particularly Bloom's Taxonomy, by fostering higher-order cognitive skills like analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Through vocabulary challenges, students engaged in deeper cognitive processing, using visual cues and contextual information to determine word meanings. The vocabulary challenges in the game prompted students to engage in deeper cognitive processing, necessitating visual cues and contextual information to deduce word meanings. Students frequently analyzed images or scenarios presented in the game and associated them with the appropriate vocabulary words. This task engages analytical processes in the brain. It enhances vocabulary retention by requiring students to connect new information with existing knowledge meaningfully rather than relying solely on rote memorization. This analytical engagement strengthened vocabulary retention by encouraging meaningful connections between new and existing knowledge rather than rote memorization. Additionally, the game promoted critical thinking and collaboration as students worked together to solve vocabulary puzzles, discuss strategies, and clarify word meanings.

The game facilitated individual student development while fostering a dynamic and interactive classroom environment, positioning learning as a collective and assembled effort. The capacity of students to learn collaboratively through game-based challenges underscores the significance of cooperation in enhancing vocabulary acquisition outcomes. Peer collaboration enhanced learning by encouraging idea exchange and reinforcing

comprehension, supporting social constructivism principles. The game's interactive nature created a dynamic classroom environment where learning became a collective effort. Moreover, peer-assisted learning allowed students to explain concepts to one another, address uncertainties, and improve vocabulary retention, demonstrating the game's effectiveness in enhancing both critical thinking and collaboration.

### **Addressing Challenges**

Despite its benefits, the "*gamestolearnenglish*" web game faced several challenges that affected its effectiveness. One major issue was technical difficulties, particularly slow or unreliable internet connectivity, which disrupted gameplay and frustrated students. Students highlighted technical challenges, particularly slow or unreliable internet connectivity, as one of the most significant hurdles. Given the game's reliance on technology, ensuring a stable internet connection is crucial. Educational institutions should invest in better digital infrastructure, and offline game versions could be developed to prevent learning interruptions. Another challenge was the initial learning curve, as some students found the game's mechanics confusing, hindering their engagement. This aligns with research indicating that digital learning tools often require adjustment. To address this, the game could include step-by-step tutorials, clear instructions, and interactive demonstrations to help students navigate it more easily. Additionally, students expressed concerns about the game's repetitive nature, which decreased engagement over time. To maintain interest, developers could introduce new levels, topics, and task variations that align with students' evolving vocabulary needs. Regular updates with fresh content would help sustain motivation and ensure long-term engagement with the learning tool.

### **CONCLUSION**

The research reveals that the "*gamestolearnenglish*" web game successfully improves vocabulary acquisition. The "*gamestolearnenglish*" web game has proven effective and engaging as a vocabulary study tool. The dynamic and gamified design substantially enhances student motivation by rendering learning more captivating. Elements such as incentives and progress monitoring sustain students' engagement, rendering vocabulary acquisition entertaining. The game's efficacy corresponds with current studies on gamified learning, illustrating how gaming components can enhance student engagement and promote long-term memory of educational material. The study emphasises the cognitive advantages of the game, particularly in improving critical thinking and collaboration, in addition to motivation. Students enhanced their higher-order cognitive skills by collaborating on problems and evaluating visual signals, including analysis and synthesis. Peer-assisted learning enhances understanding, rendering the game an effective instrument for vocabulary education. Several hurdles persist, including technical difficulties such as sluggish internet connectivity and a pronounced initial learning curve. Enhancing digital infrastructure and integrating more apparent lessons would improve the overall user experience.

A further problem is the monotonous quality of the game's material, which may result in student disengagement over time. Although the game initially engages players, the limited diversity of activities diminishes its enduring allure. To sustain engagement, developers must implement new levels, challenges, and vocabulary themes, guaranteeing that the content remains innovative and attuned to students' changing requirements. Consistent updates encompassing seasonal or thematic information may enhance engagement and avert monotony. Aligning the game with educational ideas that emphasise feedback, rewards, and difficulties will optimise its learning potential. The study recommends that academic

institutions incorporate the game into vocabulary learning programs to foster a more dynamic classroom environment. Resolving technological obstacles like internet connectivity and usability issues would enhance student accessibility. Educators should utilise the game's collaborative attributes to promote peer-assisted learning, improving vocabulary retention and critical thinking abilities. Future research should investigate the enduring effects of gamified learning technologies on various student demographics. By enhancing the game's content and resolving technical constraints, this tool can remain an invaluable asset for augmenting student learning and engagement.

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