

USING LANGUAGE GAMES TO ENHANCE MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH VOCABULARY OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS AT POPODOO ENGLISH CENTRE IN BAC NINH CITY

Nguyen Thi Nhat Le¹, Le Thi Thu Huong^{2*}

¹Popodoo English Centre in Bac Ninh city

²TNU – University of Education

ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	20/3/2023	This paper looks into the use of language games to increase the motivation to learn vocabulary of elementary students at Popodoo English Centre in Bac Ninh city. Language games were applied for 15 weeks during the English lessons of 40 elementary students. Research instruments including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and classroom observation were used to gather the data to be reflected upon. The results that were gained did confirm the positive effects of the language games on the student vocabulary learning motivation and progress, in which motivation was significantly increased in comparison with what came before games were added to the lessons. It was also found that the students had a very positive attitude towards the language games in their vocabulary lessons.
Revised:	31/3/2023	
Published:	31/3/2023	
KEYWORDS		
Language games		
Motivation		
Vocabulary learning		
Elementary students		
Popodoo English centre		

SỬ DỤNG TRÒ CHƠI NGÔN NGỮ ĐỂ NÂNG CAO ĐỘNG LỰC HỌC TỪ VỰNG TIẾNG ANH CỦA HỌC SINH TRÌNH ĐỘ SƠ CẤP TẠI TRUNG TÂM ANH NGỮ POPODOO THÀNH PHỐ BẮC NINH

Nguyễn Thị Nhật Lệ¹, Lê Thị Thu Hương^{2*}

¹Trung tâm Ngoại ngữ Popodoo, thành phố Bắc Ninh

²Trường Đại học Sư phạm – ĐH Thái Nguyên

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	20/3/2023	Bài báo này nghiên cứu việc sử dụng các trò chơi ngôn ngữ để tăng động cơ học từ vựng của học sinh trình độ sơ cấp tại Trung tâm Anh ngữ Popodoo, thành phố Bắc Ninh. Các trò chơi ngôn ngữ đã được áp dụng trong 15 tuần trong giờ học tiếng Anh của 40 học sinh trình độ sơ cấp. Công cụ nghiên cứu bao gồm khảo sát, phỏng vấn và quan sát lớp học được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu và phân tích. Kết quả thu được đã khẳng định tác động tích cực của trò chơi ngôn ngữ đối với động cơ và tiến độ học từ vựng của học sinh, trong đó động lực tăng lên rõ rệt so với trước khi trò chơi được áp dụng vào bài học. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra rằng các sinh viên có thái độ rất tích cực đối với các trò chơi trong các bài học từ vựng.
Ngày hoàn thiện:	31/3/2023	
Ngày đăng:	31/3/2023	
TỪ KHÓA		
Trò chơi ngôn ngữ		
Động lực		
Học từ vựng		
Học sinh trình độ sơ cấp		
Trung tâm tiếng Anh Popodoo		

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.7554>

* Corresponding author. Email: Huongltt.fle@tnue.edu.vn

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, English takes its stance as the predominant language, spoken by around 400 million people across the globe. English is used as a means of verbal and written communication worldwide to bridge the gaps in economic, political and social aspects [1, p. 1].

1.1. Vocabulary

Vocabulary learning is so important in learning English as it also needs to be broad enough to convey a range of thoughts and feelings otherwise with just grammar and definitions alone, then communication cannot happen in any meaningful way [2, p. 8]. In other words, Harmer [3] said that if grammar makes up the structure then vocabulary gives it the understanding.

Vocabulary is, according to Hatch & Brown [4], a list of words that speakers can use. Vocabulary is crucial for teaching and learning and so it should be taught for the full range in years from the youngest to the oldest which when mastered will really help with teaching speaking, reading and writing. As new words are added in such activities, this should be coupled with information they have already learned in order to improve retention with activities for comparing, matching, combining, sorting, visualizing and rearranging words.

Learners usually learn English vocabularies by means of rote learning, therefore; it can be so boring for them because there is lack of motivation for learners who want to continue memorizing vocabularies [5]. So, as Huyen's opinion [6, p.4], "in order to learn and retain new words, learners should participate in different task-based activities in their classroom whether it is a guessing task, a describing exercise or conversation making". This would make lessons more enjoyable for those learners, so it is essential to investigate how effectively students can learn via vocabulary games.

1.2. Language games

A game is a task or sport which is governed by a set of rules where individuals or teams compete against each other [7]. When employed in teaching languages, they generate student self-confidence and enhance their academic performance. In bringing context-based meaning into the classroom, they keep student minds active and help improve their communication skills as they are having to make use of the words that they know.

Many researchers across the world have noted the important role of games in the classroom. All ages and genders appear to react positively to games and can relieve tension after many hours study [8]. Furthermore, McCallum [9] noted that games inherently improve student interest and motivation. Avedon (1971) (referenced in [10]) described how they also feel excited and do their best to take part in such games.

A number of studies have acknowledged the use of games in vocabulary learning [11], [12]. According to Rui Li [13], game-based vocabulary learning that is well documented to improve students' vocabulary learning outcomes is gaining increasing attention. One problem is that learners do not enjoy committing tedious techniques to memory, but by using a game to teach this vocabulary, it can be made into an enjoyable process for them rather than the normal run of events in such vocabulary sessions. Thus, teaching vocabulary using games can obtain valuable benefits because we learn knowledge and have fun with the learning media. Esra Akdogan [14] showed a wide variety of different types of games that could be used including, sorting and organizing, guessing, filling knowledge gap, searching, matching, labeling, exchanging and roleplaying. These all vary from simple games with cards and matching words to full dramatizations of scenes for roleplaying.

1.3. Motivation

Motivation is the "inner determination" that drives somebody to do something. Once a goal is seen to be worth doing and appealing to us, then the goal may be strived for. This is known as "the action"

and is driven by motivation [15]. Motivation is a key to get students to study well and there are various ways to motivate students and so it is important to provide a good environment for this to happen. The use of games is one such way of improving their motivation. Many researchers have stressed their importance of using such games to gain such improvement and getting students to put their best efforts into acquiring language [16]. Studies by McCallum (1980) and Avedon (1971) (referenced in [10, p.2]) show how student interest can peak so students feel excited and determined to do their best in these games.

There are different categories of motivation and Harmer [15] categorized it into two types: short-term goals when students wish to achieve in doing something in the near future, and long-term goals: a wish to get a better job in the future or to be able to converse with people who use the language that they study. In other studies, motivation is further divided into two main classifications as Extrinsic motivation and Intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation indicates a need to avoid punishment and gain a reward. It stresses the external need to convince the students to do their part in a learning activity [17]. Intrinsic motivation means learning for learning's sake – it is a reward in itself [17]. When intrinsically motivated, they have the inner desire to learn and so there is no need for any external outcomes.

In this article, language games were relied on with a view to enhance intrinsic motivation for long-term effect. Therefore, teachers are expected to provide classroom activities with supportive environment to facilitate their learning in which language games are included.

1.4. Previous studies

Perveen et al. [18] tried to figure out the effectiveness of language games in acquiring vocabulary while learning English as a second language (ESL) in the Pakistani context. The results of the investigation showed that, in comparison to memorization, games could help students become familiar with new words or phrases and facilitate deep learning of vocabulary. The ability of students to communicate is also facilitated through games. The majority of students concurred that learning new methods through games was effective in enhancing vocabulary.

A study by Neyadi [11] investigated the impact of engaging in games to improve vocabulary acquisition in a school where Arabic is the primary language of teaching. Through observations of how vocabulary is taught in schools, it is concluded that drilling the vocabulary is necessary for students to pronounce words correctly. Rarely, and for a brief period of time, do other methods of teaching vocabulary such as the usage of games employed. Teachers choose to utilize drilling as a quick method of teaching and learning vocabulary because using games is thought to take more time.

Huyen [6] conducted research to determine how language games assist students to acquire English vocabulary efficiently. They believed that combining games with other learning activities, like computer-assisted language learning, would be advantageous. After reviewing the relatively few academic views on this topic, they started their action research, which involved implementing games in their own classes, watching other teachers' classes, and interviewing both teachers and students to get their reactions and feelings about the value of games in vocabulary learning. According to research, games are a good way to assist students to develop their vocabulary.

All of the above studies confirmed the benefits of games in students' learning process. However, there is no research carried out in the context of a language centre. That is the reason why the researcher would like to investigate the use of language games to enhance the motivation to learn English vocabulary among elementary students at Popodoo English centre in Bac Ninh city.

1.5. ARCS Motivational Design Model

As the definition of motivational design is “the process of arranging resources and procedures to bring about changes in people's motivation” [19]. The Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS) Model, is another name for Keller's Instructional Model of Motivation.

a. Attention: Gaining the full attention of the students for learning to occur, regardless of the learning environment, is vital for the tutor. This must be maintained throughout the session, in order to be meaningful. It is vital to gain student interest in the subject matter, which can be achieved by making use of the group's own interests.

b. Relevance: Students need to realize that their experience is significant or necessary in order to memorise the information. They should be able to take pleasure in their learning and reach their studying objectives as a result. The teacher should make themselves aware of student interests and link them to the lessons.

c. Confidence: Getting students to believe in themselves and their abilities. There are several ways to include techniques for improving student confidence in every day lessons such as providing objectives and prerequisites, growing the learners, feedback, learner control

d. Satisfaction: For learning to continue to be successful, satisfaction is essential. If the students are happy with the output, they will be more motivated to learn. Different methods might be used in class by instructors to encourage satisfaction.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research aims and questions

Two goals for this study are to answer: *How do language games affect student vocabulary learning? and what are student attitudes towards the use of games in vocabulary learning?*

2.2. Participants

This study was conducted with the assistance of 40 elementary students from an English class at Popodoo English Centre in Bac Ninh city. All of the students were at elementary level and the study was conducted during the second semester of the school year 2020-2021. Throughout this study, the author herself played the role of teacher for these students.

2.3. Action research

Action research is understood to be an accurate reflection of its name as it strives to carry out actions as well as research simultaneously [20]. McNiff [21] defines this as being self-reflective and practitioner-based with self-evaluation. The study of a real school is set with the idea of improving the outcomes and actions taken [22]. To enhance professional judgment, to adapt practices to accomplish educational goals for the best practice approach, action research allows the educator to look into a particular technique for the improvement of their professional environment) [23]. The teacher's efforts can be assessed and if successful or not, and if not, adjustments can be made and things can be tried again. Regardless of definition, action research always involves the teachers conducting the research themselves and then intend to make changes on the results of that research. The whole process of the research was divided into four steps: planning, action, observation and reflection [24].

2.4. Data collection instruments and analysis

In order to analyze the levels of motivation and to gain insight into student attitudes to the use of language games in their lessons, the following instruments were used such as survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with some open-ended questions and observation. During the 15-week implementation, the author observed the process and recorded the student's engagement in the classes and their activities. These descriptive observations were recorded and maintained after each lesson.

2.5. The study procedure

The survey questionnaire data was collected throughout the first and second weeks. In the fifteenth week, interviews on student motivation were collected and kept for data analysis. Meanwhile, observations were conducted throughout the course.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Questionnaires

3.1.1. Questionnaires about students' motivation

Table 1 aims to provide the descriptive statistics of student motivation in learning vocabulary.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of student motivation in learning vocabulary

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-intervention	2.8484	12	0.23799	0.06871
Post-intervention	4.0693	12	0.56758	0.16386

Table 1 compares the mean scores for each question from the pre- and post- interventions. According to the results, which were displayed in table 1, students' average motivation scores were significantly higher after the intervention (Mean = 4.0693, SD = 0.56758) than they were before (Mean = 2.8484, SD = 0.23799). It demonstrates that motivation in learning vocabulary was much higher after the intervention rather than beforehand.

3.1.2. Questionnaire on the use of language games to learn vocabulary

SPSS was used to calculate the scale reliability for the overall and each scale of the ARCS model. Internal consistency and reliability were both measured by Cronbach's alpha. Values of 0.7 or above were regarded as satisfactory. In general, all scales demonstrated acceptable dependability, which was above the value of 0.7, as shown in table 2.

Table 2 reveal that the overall dependability of all scales on the standardized Cronbach Alpha was 0.96 (n = 28 on 36 items). Particularly, 12 attention-related items had a satisfactory reliability of 0.86. Because the alpha value was 0.81, nine questions that were relevant demonstrated adequate dependability. Nine confidence-related questions displayed acceptable reliability with an alpha value of 0.88. Six satisfaction-related questions were included, and they display acceptable reliability with an alpha value of 0.90. The findings in table 2 showed that the scales accurately measured the concept, which meant that the survey questionnaires had good dependability.

Table 2. Scale reliability based on Cronbach's alpha

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Total scale	0.96	36
Attention	0.86	12
Relevance	0.81	9
Confidence	0.88	9
Satisfaction	0.90	6

3.1.3. Overall game evaluation

The following degrees of interpretation in the survey data on students' attitudes toward using language games were shown in table 3.

Table 3. Range of motivation level

Motivation Level	Scores
Very high	4.51-5.00
High	3.51-4.50
Moderate	2.51-3.50
Low	1.51-2.50
Very low	1.00-1.50

Table 3 shows that there were five levels of student opinion regarding the usage of language games: Very high (4.51-5.00 score), High (3.51-4.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), Low (1.51-2.50), and Very low (1.00-1.50).

Table 4. Overall mean scores of students' evaluation

Scale	N	Mean
Total scale	28	4.41

Next, table 4 shows the total mean score from questionnaires on the use of language games. Accordingly, the mean overall score was 4.41, which indicated that students gave the games a high rating (4.51-5.00 score).

The number of respondents in each level was counted and is shown in table 5 in further detail.

Table 5. Numbers of respondents in each level

Motivation Level	Total N = 28
Very low	1
Low	5
Moderate	6
High	9

3.1.4. Questionnaires about students' attitudes toward language games

The percentages of respondents in each level related to students' attitudes toward language games was given in figure 1.

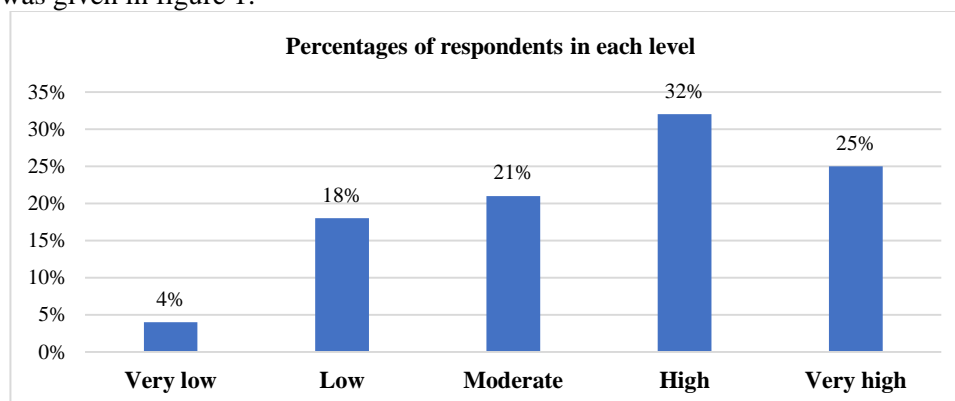
**Figure 1.** Percentages of respondents in each level

Figure 1 indicated that the majority of students had good comments about the usage of language games in English lessons. More than half of the 28 respondents had high or extremely high levels of motivation. While less than 20% of people had low and very low motivation levels, more than 20% had moderate levels. The study's findings showed that the 40 survey respondents were mostly motivated to learn vocabulary by playing language games, with about 80% of them reporting very high, high, or medium degrees of motivation.

3.2. Semi-structured interview

The four ARCS model scales were the subject of open-ended questions for 5 students to respond to in terms of 3 scales: Attention, Relevance and Confidence, the interview results were available.

For "Attention", all students had their attention captured by what was on screen and how it was arranged, with some particularly indicating the bright shapes and sound effects helped them pay attention.

For "Relevance", 4 students thought the game was very beneficial and definitely relevant to what they learned inside class and outside though only one student thought it was only relevant to the lesson itself.

For "Confidence", 4 students did not see the game as either too complex or too difficult. Most thought it was not overly challenging. Only one student actually said that learning vocabulary was very important and wanted to see if they knew the answers to questions or not.

For “Satisfaction”, all students said that getting feedback after every question had helped them get the right responses. This kept them motivated to carry on learning and see the errors where they were going wrong. They did say that feedback scoring should not happen throughout the game but left to the end of the game to see all the results together.

3.3. Observations

The process of teaching and acquiring vocabulary has some issues, such as (1) students not paying attention; (2) students talking to each other or using their phones during instructor explanations, and (3) students sitting passively and not actively participating in the lesson. Based on the issue in the classroom, it can be concluded that the students’ issues were brought on by their lack of interest in learning English. The fact is that the class's low interest in acquiring vocabulary was validated by the pre-intervention results. The researcher sought to teach vocabulary through language games to increase student motivation.

In initial observations, it was noticed that the majority of the students lacked any motivation for their vocabulary learning. They displayed behavioral issues including lack of attention, talking or using their phones whilst the teacher was speaking or simply sitting passively and not participating actively in what they were supposed to be doing. It was clear that this was because of a lack of interest in learning English. This is why the author wanted to teach vocabulary using games for greater motivation. There was at first anticipated that using games would not be a challenge, however some students were at first, not enthused and even questioned why they were being done at the first implementation. After several weeks, this status was seen to be changing, and because of their increasing enjoyment of the games, their motivation to learn from their lessons increased, with more and more of them visibly enjoying themselves.

Overall, the observations of the students learning vocabulary via the use of games showed that they became very much more interested in learning by the time the course came to an end.

3.4. Discussion

From the findings from the surveys, interviews and observation it can be concluded that language games in the classroom have a really positive impact upon student enthusiasm to learn new words. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of these games does increase student motivation to learn their vocabulary. It was also seen that students gave the games a very positive rating across the ARCS spectrum. The four components of the ARCS model were used to assess student motivation level and attitudes towards these quiz games. This dramatically increased learner motivation in learning their vocabulary.

This can be explained in a number of reasons. Firstly, it is thought that the language game elements that were employed are appropriate for attention-grabbing, with the colorful and sound-rich elements of the software being well designed to catch the player’s eye, and having been given quizzes set at an appropriate level for their abilities. The answers were only displayed on the main screen, under the teacher’s control, rather than on player devices – which ensured the student’s close attention. The students were also able to compete with their friends via a mobile phone app when taking part.

Even the shyest students found it easier to participate fully in the lessons. Students also showed a high level of satisfaction with the feedback from the game. Immediate feedback had a big effect on how motivated they were. They could see who were the top scorers, with the final round announcing the winner on the screen. Prior to the use of the game, the only way of assessing their learning was to give them paper-based tasks – to which feedback would have been much slower.

So using games via an Internet program is preferable to conventional teaching methods. This is helpful as the students have grown up with the digital age and are more accustomed to using it.

4. Conclusion

With the objectives achieved in seeing the effect of language games on students learning vocabulary, language games have had a very significant impact upon them, with increased motivation levels and an overall very positive reaction from the students themselves. The use of language games has been shown to be effective, however, sometimes student understanding of the instructions led to some confusion and problems when playing the games and as a result some fell behind the pace of the teacher. It is recommended that the teacher makes sure that the tasks, roles of the students and other details are made very clear to the class to avoid possible game failure. Therefore, teachers should encourage the students to push themselves by providing original, interesting and varied approaches ensuring student enjoyment in the participation in learning their vocabulary.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. H. T. Wong and M. M. Yunus, "Board Games in Improving Pupils' Speaking Skills: A Systematic Review," *Sustainability*, vol. 13, no. 16, 2021, Art. no. 8772, doi: 10.3390/su13168772.
- [2] M. McCarthy, *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- [3] J. Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1991.
- [4] E. Hatch and S. Brown, *Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- [5] S. Nahid and K. Zahra, "On the Effect of Playing Digital Games on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Motivation toward Learning English Vocabularies," *International Conference on Current Trends in ELT, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 98, pp. 1738-1743, 2014, Published by Elsevier Ltd, doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.601.
- [6] T. T. H. Nguyen, "Learning vocabulary through games," *Asian EFL Journal*, vol. 3, pp. 77-89, 2003.
- [7] A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English*. [Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- [8] Y. Y. Mei and J. Y. Jing, *The importance of using games in EFL classrooms*. Daejin University ELT Research Paper, 2000.
- [9] J. McCallum, *101 Word Games*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1980.
- [10] A. Deesri, "Games in the ESL and EFL class," *The Internet TESL Journal*, vol. 8, no. 9, pp. 1-5, 2002.
- [11] O. S. Neyadi, "The Effects of Using Games to Reinforce Vocabulary Learning. Journal of Semantic Scholar," *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, Corpus ID: 59822151, 2007. [Online]. Available: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Effects-of-Using-Games-to-Reinforce-Vocabulary-Neyadi/e14b59cd8c1366d6752321b6fc108b1060733ca4>. [Accessed January 15, 2023].
- [12] P. Tunchalearnpanih, *Using Games on P.6 Students' Vocabulary Learning*. Thailand: Srinakharinwirot University (SWU), 2012.
- [13] R. Li, "Does Game-Based Vocabulary Learning APP Influence Chinese EFL Learners' Vocabulary Achievement, Motivation, and Self-Confidence?" *SAGE Open*, pp. 1-12, January-March 2021, doi: 10.1177/21582440211003092.
- [14] E. Akdogan, "Developing vocabulary in game activities and game materials," *Journal of Teaching and Education*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 31-64, 2017.
- [15] J. Harmer, *The practice of English language teaching*, 3rd ed. Cambridge, UK: Longman, 2001.
- [16] A. Wright, D. Betteridge, and M. Buckby, *Games for language learning*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- [17] J. Arnold, *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- [18] A. Perveen, "Effectiveness Of Language Games in Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition," *Science International (Lahore)*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 633-637, 2016.
- [19] J. M. Keller, *Development of Two Measures of Learner Motivation*. Florida: Florida States University, 2006.
- [20] B. Dick, "Action research," *International Journal of Action Research*, vol. 3, no. 1+2, pp. 149-167, 2002.
- [21] J. McNiff, *Action Research for Professional Development: Concise Advice for New (and Experienced) Action Researchers*. Dorset, September 2010.
- [22] R. A. Schmuck, *Practical Action Research for Change*. Illinois: Skylight Professional Development, 1997.
- [23] J. Skytt, *Action research guide for Alberta teachers*. Edmonton, Alberta: Alberta Teachers' Association Group, 2000.
- [24] S. Kemmis and R. McTaggart, *The action research planner*, 3rd ed. Geelong: Deakin University, 1988.