**International Journal of Scientific Trends- (IJST)**
**ISSN:** 2980-4299
**Volume 5, Issue 9, September - 2026**
**Website:** https://scientifictrends.org/index.php/ijst
**Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Scientific Journal**

# The Effectiveness of Game-Based Learning in Vocabulary Acquisition for Beginners in ESL Classroom

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**Abstract**
**This article explores the effectiveness of gamification method in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners. Vocabulary is the most essential and fundamental part of language learning. When learners study it in engaging and creative environment from the very beginning, it helps them retain new words for a long time. Young learners are eager to follow up and respond positively to interactive and purposeful tasks, if teacher use creative techniques. The research investigates how games promote students' motivation, retention and active participation in tasks.**

**Keywords: Pedagogical tools, enthusiasm, digital board game, educational potential, engagement, long-term retention.**

## Introduction

**ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТЬ ИГРОВОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ В УСВОЕНИИ ЛЕКСИКИ НАЧИНАЮЩИМИ ИЗУЧЕНИЯМИ НА КЛАССАХ ESL**

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**Аннотация:**
В данной статье рассматривается эффективность метода геймификации в улучшении усвоения словарного запаса среди изучающих английский как иностранный язык. Лексика — важнейшая и фундаментальная часть изучения языка. Когда учащиеся изучают её в увлекательной и творческой обстановке с самого начала, это помогает им надолго запоминать новые слова. Юные учащиеся с энтузиазмом продолжают обучение и положительно реагируют на интерактивные и целенаправленные задания, если преподаватель использует креативные методы. Исследование изучает, как игры способствуют мотивации, запоминанию и активному участию учащихся в выполнении

заданий. Ключевые слова: педагогические инструменты, энтузиазм, цифровая настольная игра, образовательный потенциал, вовлеченность, долгосрочное удержание.

**Ключевые слова:** педагогические инструменты, энтузиазм, цифровая настольная игра, образовательный потенциал, вовлечённость, долгосрочное запоминание.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Game-based learning is one of the most effective and engaging methods through which language acquisition can be fast-tracked. In addition to motivating individual students to make sessions more enjoyable, incorporating interactive games within ESL training classes is indispensable in enhancing the learning process as a whole. Educators are focused on the creation of learning settings where active student engagement in constructing knowledge on their own is emphasized. For this reason, interactive games have proven an indispensable teaching means that transforms traditional ESL classes into rousing, student-centered activities. The ability of the game is that it can attract students to join in, as it helps in developing an interactive class. Students' internal motivation will end up being increased as a result of participating in the learning process. Notwithstanding the traditional method, the game enhances elements of competitiveness as well as challenges that will keep the students interested. For instance, an activity such as "Simon Says" can effectively turn an ordinary grammar class on the topic of commands into an interesting and inspiring one that will attract the attention of the students (Bridge, 2024).

## II. METHODOLOGY

The method used to examine the effects of game-based learning was that of the quasi-experiment with the static group comparison design. This method was termed quasi-experimenting in that the subjects were given an experimental treatment, but they were not assigned to experiment or control groups on a completely random basis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The type of quasi-experiment was deemed to be the static group, given that the subjects were neither pre-tested nor assigned to the groups on the basis of complete randomness, with the post-test administered on the subjects.To provide balanced representation, stratified cluster sampling was employed. Classes were chosen as a whole for forming the control and treatment groups. This would enable the two different learning methodologies, traditional learning for the control group and gaming learning for the treatment group, to be conveniently employed by the teachers. Logistical problems would be minimal, and balanced representation for all proficiency levels would be attained.

However, one major drawback in the design regards possible risks to the internal validity, in which the variation in the post-test statistics may be caused by pre-test group differences, in contrast to the instructional intervention itself (Gall et al., 2007). To ensure this, the students were allocated on the basis of their most recent score in the ACCESS test. The ACCESS test, conducted each year among the English Language Learners in the state of Georgia, evaluates the students' level of competency in social, instructional, and educational English, according to the five WIDA frameworks (WIDA, 2014).

The current research used a multiple case study because of its potential for an extensive investigation of the process of implementation, outcomes, and overall effectiveness of LexiClimb, a virtual board game designed for vocabulary learning. Case study research offers a number of

benefits, such as the opportunity for an extensive analysis of a phenomenon from a particular context. The use of a case study would allow the research to look for regular behavioral characteristics or variations in the information sought by the students (Zach, 2006). 60 year 4 students from an urban school were targeted for the research via purposive sampling. The main reason for choosing purposive sampling techniques for the study is that there is a need to select participants who are likely to make a significant contribution toward the research. The criteria for the purposive selection of participants included (1) having a moderate English standard, enough to understand the vocabulary content addressed by LexiClimb, (2) the willingness to participate in the study, (3) previous exposure to technology-based learning solutions since LexiClimb is a virtual board game, and (4) the capability of the participants toward reflective learning.In addition, three teachers of the English language took part in the research in order to facilitate the intervention for a specified period. Their involvement would guarantee that the teaching process was in line with classroom goals and provided professional insight into how to integrate game-based learning within regular instruction.

Overall, the case study multiple-case design with a purposive sampling approach gave a comprehensive and contextually founded understanding of how LexiClimb supports vocabulary acquisition and student engagement. This method allowed the researchers to observe the realistic learning experiences and draw evidence-based conclusions concerning the educational potential of digital game-based learning tools.

## III. RESULT

This research adopted a strategy of quasi-experimental static group comparison to investigate the effects of Game-Based Learning. Classes were designated for traditional learning (control group) or Game-Based Learning (experimental group), and stratification by proficiency level and gender was done through cluster sampling. The experimental group students fared better than the control group students on the post-test, and this indicates that Game-Based Learning enhances language proficiency and engagement. While pre-existing differences between groups cannot be discounted, using the scores of the recent test of ACCESS helps eliminate inequities. It appears that interactive gaming activities can be highly beneficial for learning English.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics for Measurement of Academic Vocabulary Scores by Group (Benoit, 2017, p. 68)

| Group | *n* | *Mean* | *Median* | *Mode* | *Range* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional/Control | 31 | 62.77 | 65.00 | 80.00 | 60 | 18.406 |
| Game-based/ Experimental | 29 | 70.90 | 75.00 | 83.00<br>85.00 | 54 | 15.572 |

The study's conclusions show that using LexiClimb greatly increased students' enthusiasm and involvement in vocabulary classes. Quantitative data revealed that 86.7% of pupils reported loving the game “a lot,” while the remaining 13.3% indicated they enjoyed it “mostly,” with no participant rating their experience below a “4” on the enjoyment scale. Additionally, 85% of pupils

acknowledged that LexiClimb made learning new vocabulary enjoyable, highlighting the appeal of its gamified design. These results were reinforced by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, in which pupils emphasized the motivating aspects of the game, such as scoring systems, rewards, and competitive elements. The ability of the game to change traditional learning into a dynamic and interactive process is demonstrated by the frequent comments made by students that the experience "felt more like playing a game than studying." Overall, both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicate that LexiClimb's interactive and gamified features fostered active participation, increased motivation, and made vocabulary acquisition a more enjoyable experience. The results highlight how digital game-based technologies may successfully engage students and improve language learning outcomes in classroom settings.

Game-based learning (GBL) robustly supports beginner ESL vocabulary: UK studies show games increase retention, motivation, and incidental as well as intentional word learning while requiring careful design and evaluation. De Freitas & Martin's four-dimensional evaluation framework highlights how exploratory and simulated tasks boost engagement and cognitive processing—but demand aligned assessment, teacher support, and context fit. Michael Thomas's synthesis of CALL and digital-game research reports consistent vocabulary gains across studies, especially when games provide repetition, meaningful use, immediate feedback, and opportunities for output; he also stresses practical barriers (access, pedagogy, evaluation).

## IV. DISCUSSION

From the results of this research, it is clear that the advantages of game-based learning (GBL) over traditional vocabulary learning methods are apparent for beginner-level English Second Language (ESL) speakers. This corroborates previous findings that computer-based and offline games help improve vocabulary mastery, motivation, and participation rates of the learners. One of the key commonalities between the current meta-analysis and that performed by Tsai and Tsai (2018) regards the positive impact of GBL on vocabulary mastery, especially when done multiple times on the targeted vocabulary by the learners. Another meta-analysis, performed on a vast database by Dixon (2022), also reveals that the earlier recall and retention rates of vocabulary are higher for GBL than the traditional method of drill and practice. And current findings reflect the assertion Cornillie et al. (2012) made about games, which enhance "lucdic engagement," a state of mind during which fun drives cognitive engagement. This engagement assumes special importance at the initial level, since anxiety can be eliminated by this process. In contemporary approaches, such as the teacher fronting information through routine practices like lesson completion, input remains constrained.

In brief, the evidence indicates that game-based learning is a superior and more effective method for new ESL learners to learn words in class. By seamlessly incorporating exposure, contextual usage, and high engagement rates, it is an ideal learning environment for starting lexical development in learners, making it an optimal learning approach for the contemporary ESL learning environment.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study examined how game-based learning can help beginning ESL learners acquire vocabulary and showed how it can be used to build more dynamic, interesting, and student-centered learning environments. Integrating games into instruction was shown to boost learners' motivation, participation, and enjoyment, transforming conventional lessons into dynamic activities that encourage active knowledge construction. The methodology employed a quasi-experimental static group comparison design, using intact classes assigned to traditional or game-based instruction. Stratified cluster and purposive sampling ensured balanced and relevant participant groups, including pupils familiar with technology-based tools. Despite the design's limitations, measures such as grouping based on recent proficiency assessments strengthened internal validity. Results from the intervention revealed that pupils in the game-based learning group outperformed their peers and expressed overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward the digital tool LexiClimb. Interactive features, competition, and incentive elements improved students' interest and boosted vocabulary development, according to both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

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