



Gamification in teaching vocabulary to secondary school students

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Abstract. This paper focus on exploring the effectiveness of gamification in teaching vocabulary to secondary school students. Vocabulary is considered as a fundamental component of learning languages, yet traditional learning methods cannot attract the attention of students and sustain their attention. In recent years, gamification which involves applying game-like features such as competition and rewards in non-gaming settings, has become a modern and effective method for increasing student engagement and improving learning results. The main of this work is to investigate how strategies of gamification affects to students’ motivation, retention and classroom participation. In this research employs both quantitative and qualitative methods, observations of classroom, test in order to check the improvement of vocabulary. Participants of secondary school students were chosen who participated in gamified vocabulary activities. The result gives the gamification is the best way to increase students' motivation to learn and memorize vocabulary easily, and to participate the lessons well. So gamified teaching gives healthy competition, collaboration among students. According to research, gamification is the best solution to teach and learn languages in both teachers and students. In can give best pedagogical tool for sides. It is recommended that If teachers use like these tools in secondary schools, they can create more convenient conditions and interactive learning environment.

Keywords: gamification, vocabulary learning, secondary school students, motivation, student engagement, language teaching

1.Introduction



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Vocabulary is widely recognized as one of the most fundamental components of language learning and academic achievement. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, vocabulary knowledge plays a critical role in developing learners' ability to communicate effectively, comprehend written and spoken texts, and perform successfully across all language skills. Without an adequate vocabulary base, learners often struggle to express their ideas, understand instructions, or engage meaningfully with academic content. Despite its central importance, vocabulary instruction in many secondary schools continues to depend on traditional approaches such as repetitive memorization, word lists, and translation exercises. These conventional methods, however, frequently fail to capture students' interest or ensure long-term retention of new words.

Secondary school students represent a learner group with distinct motivational and cognitive needs. Research in educational psychology indicates that adolescents are particularly prone to disengagement when classroom activities lack relevance, challenge, or interactivity. As a result, educators and researchers have increasingly turned their attention to alternative instructional strategies that can make vocabulary learning more dynamic and meaningful. One such approach that has attracted growing interest in recent years is gamification. Gamification refers to the intentional use of game-based elements — such as points, badges, leaderboards, rewards, and challenges — within educational settings to enhance learner engagement and promote active participation.

Gamification is not merely about entertainment; it is a pedagogical strategy grounded in motivation theory and learner-centered principles. By incorporating competitive and collaborative game mechanics into vocabulary instruction, teachers can create classroom environments where students feel motivated to participate, take risks, and persist



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through difficulties. Furthermore, gamified activities provide immediate feedback, which is essential for vocabulary acquisition and self-regulated learning.

This paper examines the role of gamification as an innovative instructional approach in teaching vocabulary to secondary school students. It focuses on how game-based strategies support vocabulary retention, learner motivation, and classroom engagement.

In particular, the study will explore:

- How gamification strategies are applied in secondary school vocabulary lessons
- The advantages of gamification compared to traditional vocabulary teaching methods
- How gamification influences students' motivation and vocabulary retention
- The challenges teachers encounter when implementing gamified activities in EFL classrooms

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of game-based instructional practices and offer practical recommendations for English teachers working with secondary school learners.

2. Literature Review

Vocabulary is widely regarded as one of the most fundamental components of language acquisition, directly supporting learners' ability to communicate effectively across all four language skills. Despite its recognized importance, traditional vocabulary instruction — which has long relied on isolated word lists, repetitive drilling, and



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translation-based exercises — has been widely criticized for failing to promote meaningful or long-term retention. As a result, educators and researchers have increasingly sought alternative strategies that can make vocabulary learning more engaging and effective for secondary school learners. One such alternative that has gained considerable attention in recent years is gamification. Gamification is defined as the intentional application of game-design elements — such as point systems, leaderboards, achievement badges, timed challenges, and reward structures — within non-game educational environments. Its theoretical foundation draws from Self-Determination Theory, which identifies three core psychological needs that effective learning must address: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Gamification is particularly well suited to satisfying all three of these needs simultaneously, distinguishing it from conventional instruction that relies solely on grades and examinations as motivational tools.

Impirical research has consistently supported the effectiveness of gamification in vocabulary instruction. Game-based tasks, reward systems, and competitive environments encourage active participation and enable learners to acquire and retain new words more effectively than traditional methods. Digital platforms such as Kahoot, Wordwall, and Quizlet have demonstrated particular success in secondary school settings, providing immediate feedback, fostering healthy competition, and supporting repeated exposure to target vocabulary. Non-digital gamified activities such as Spelling Bee contests, Vocabulary Bingo, and role-play tasks have similarly shown positive effects on vocabulary memorization and learner confidence.

Despite these advantages, implementing gamification is not without challenges. Leaderboard systems may discourage some learners when direct ranking comparisons are made, and unequal access to digital tools across different school contexts may limit



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certain approaches. Nevertheless, researchers broadly conclude that when thoughtfully designed and appropriately implemented, gamification represents a valuable and effective pedagogical strategy for vocabulary instruction at the secondary school level.

Title	Author	Year	Key findings	Method
The game of Learning	Kapp,K.M.	2012	Game elements develop intrinsic motivation and improve long-term retention	Theoretical
Learning Vocabulary in Another Language	Nation, I. S. P.	2001	Repeated exposure and motivation are essential for vocabulary acquisition	Quantitative
Gamification in EFL Vocabulary Teaching	Shabrina & Taufiq	2023	Gamification increases student motivation and focus during vocabulary lessons	Mixed methods
Digital Game-Based	Franciosi, S.	2016	Gamified learners achieved greater	Quantitative



Vocabulary Learning			vocabulary gains than control group	
Self-Determination Theory	Ryan & Deci	2000	Gamification satisfies autonomy, competence and relatedness needs	Theoretical

3. Objective Questions

1. To what extent does gamification influence students' vocabulary development?
2. What are students' perceptions of learning through gamification?

4. Research Methodology

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of gamification as an instructional strategy for teaching vocabulary to secondary school students. After reviewing relevant literature, a structured questionnaire and classroom observations were used to collect data about teachers' and students' experiences with gamification in EFL settings. The study follows a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data. Questionnaires were distributed to secondary school English teachers and students to investigate how gamification is applied during vocabulary lessons and how it influences learners' vocabulary development and classroom participation. In addition,



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classroom observations were conducted to analyze how gamified activities such as Kahoot, Wordwall, Spelling Bee, Vocabulary Bingo, and role-play tasks support vocabulary learning among secondary school learners. The collected data were analyzed to understand the effectiveness of gamification in improving learners' motivation, vocabulary retention, and active participation in EFL classrooms.

4.1 Participants

A total of 18 participants took part in this study. Among them, 16 were students and 2 were English teachers. Out of the students, 8 were female and 10 were male. The participants were selected from secondary-level EFL classrooms where English is taught as a foreign language. The sample was chosen to examine how gamification strategies are used during vocabulary lessons and how they affect learners' vocabulary development, participation, and motivation in the classroom.

4.2 Research Tools

This study used a mixed-method approach with a structured questionnaire and classroom observation. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections.

Section A: Demographic Information

Collected basic information about the participants such as gender, age, and their role in the classroom (student or teacher).

Section B: Gamification Practices



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Included several statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) to examine how frequently gamification is used in vocabulary lessons and how it supports learners' vocabulary development, motivation, and classroom participation.

Section C: Perceptions of Gamification

Contained multiple-choice and opinion-based questions to identify teachers' and students' attitudes toward gamification and its effectiveness in improving vocabulary learning outcomes.

In addition, **classroom observations** were conducted to analyze how teachers organize gamified vocabulary activities such as Kahoot, Wordwall, Spelling Bee, Vocabulary Bingo, and role-play tasks, provide feedback, and evaluate students' progress during lessons. The questionnaire was designed using established research methods and was revised to ensure clarity and reliability. A pilot version was tested to confirm that the questions were understandable and consistent.

4.3 Procedure

The study was carried out in a secondary school classroom environment, where structured questionnaires were manually distributed to both teachers and students. All participants provided informed consent and participated voluntarily and anonymously in order to maintain confidentiality and protect personal information. After gathering 18 fully completed responses and conducting the planned classroom observations, the collected data was organized and analyzed. Quantitative data obtained from the Likert-scale questionnaire items were used to calculate descriptive statistics, including



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frequency distributions and mean scores, to identify the consistency of gamification implementation in vocabulary teaching practices. In addition, the qualitative observation data — particularly related to teacher guidance, gamified vocabulary activities, and feedback processes — were grouped into categories to examine how these elements contribute to vocabulary development, learner motivation, and active participation in the secondary school EFL classroom.

Table 1: Likert Scale Questionnaire Results

No	Question/Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Playing vocabulary games like Kahoot and Wordwall helps me remember new words better.	6	8	3	1	0
2	I enjoy learning new vocabulary more when it is taught through games and activities.	7	7	2	1	1
3	Earning points and badges during vocabulary games makes me want to learn more.	5	8	4	1	0
4	Gamified vocabulary lessons make me feel less	4	9	3	2	0



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	nervous and more confident in class.					
5	Competing with my classmates in vocabulary games encourages me to study harder.	5	7	4	2	0
6	I remember new words more easily when I learn them through game-based activities.	6	8	2	2	0
7	Working in teams during gamified vocabulary tasks helps me learn from my classmates.	4	9	3	1	1
8	Vocabulary games such as Spelling Bee and Vocabulary Bingo make lessons more enjoyable.	7	7	2	2	0
9	I find it difficult to focus during gamified lessons because they are too competitive.	2	4	5	5	2



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10	Overall, I think gamification helps me love learning English vocabulary more.	6	8	2	1	1
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Table 1 indicates that the majority of secondary school students find gamified vocabulary activities highly useful for improving their motivation and language learning outcomes. The majority of students agreed that playing vocabulary games such as Kahoot and Wordwall helps them remember new words more effectively, making the vocabulary learning process significantly more engaging and enjoyable. Furthermore, the data shows that earning points, badges, and competing in game-based activities actively encourages learners to participate more actively and retain new vocabulary more effectively than traditional teaching methods.

However, certain pedagogical difficulties were identified during the implementation process. A notable portion of the participants reported that they find overly competitive gamified activities distracting or discouraging, which occasionally hindered their focus on actual vocabulary learning. Additionally, the responses highlight that while working in teams during gamified tasks is perceived as enjoyable and collaborative, some classroom routines still do not provide sufficient opportunities for meaningful vocabulary practice beyond the game itself.

Most respondents strongly agreed or agreed that gamification positively influences their overall vocabulary learning process and fosters a deeper interest in the English language. Nonetheless, a few participants remained neutral or expressed disagreement, indicating that gamified lessons are not always fully optimized to meet every learner's individual needs and learning style. Despite the clear motivational benefits — such as increased



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student confidence and enthusiasm during game-based vocabulary activities — challenges related to excessive competition, limited access to digital tools, and the need for more structured post-game vocabulary practice still impact the overall effectiveness of gamification implementation.

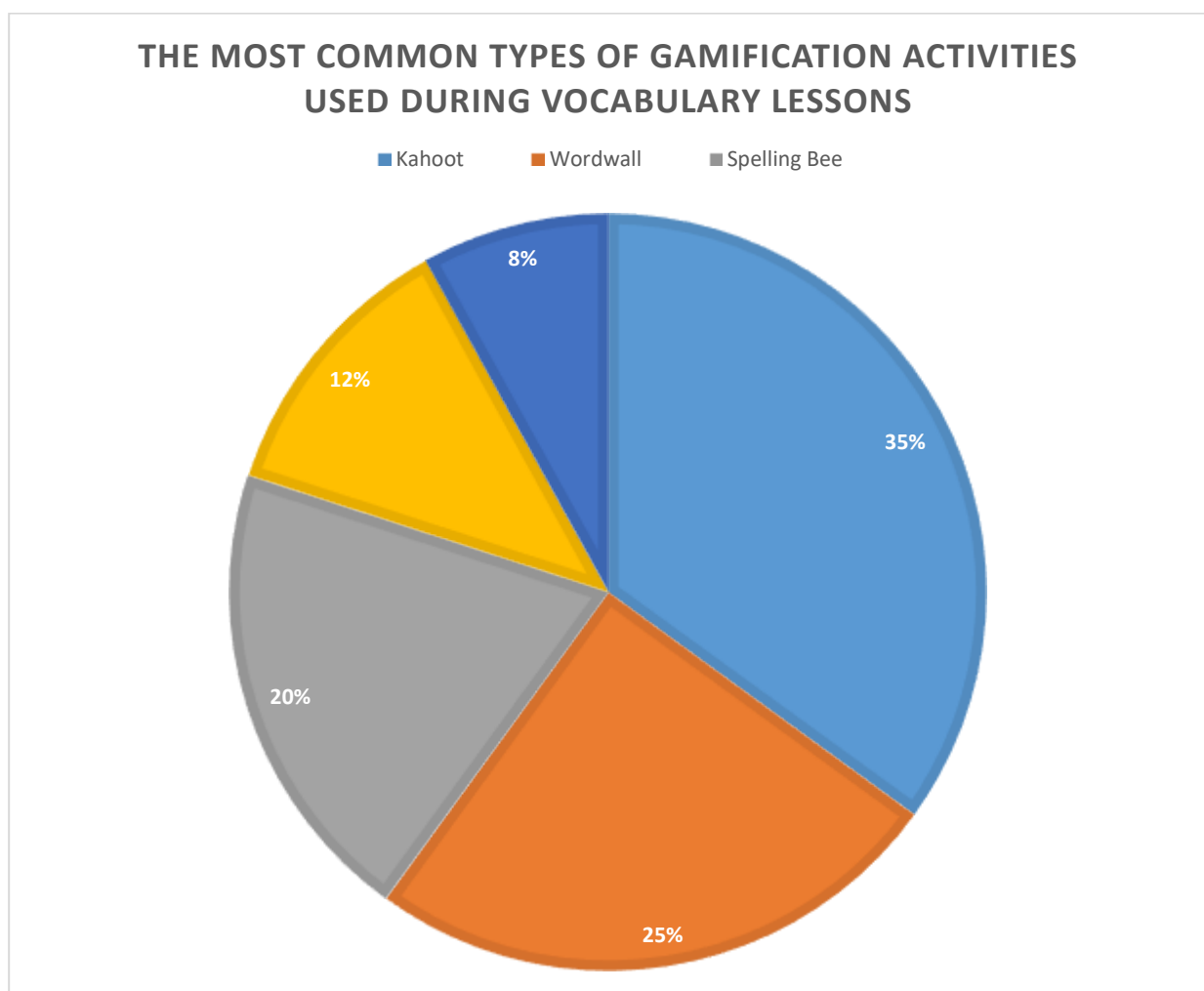


Figure 1: The most common types of gamification activities used during vocabulary lessons

The pie chart illustrates the distribution of gamified activities utilized during vocabulary lessons to support learners' vocabulary development. The observed data demonstrates



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that Kahoot and Wordwall were exceptionally prominent, collectively accounting for 60% of the gamified activities implemented during lessons. Spelling Bee contests followed closely behind, representing 20% of the total recorded activities. Meanwhile, Vocabulary Bingo (12%) and Role-play tasks (8%) comprised the remaining activities. This distribution highlights a deliberate reliance on digital game-based tools, validating gamification as a highly effective instructional strategy for encouraging active participation and long-term vocabulary retention among secondary school learners.

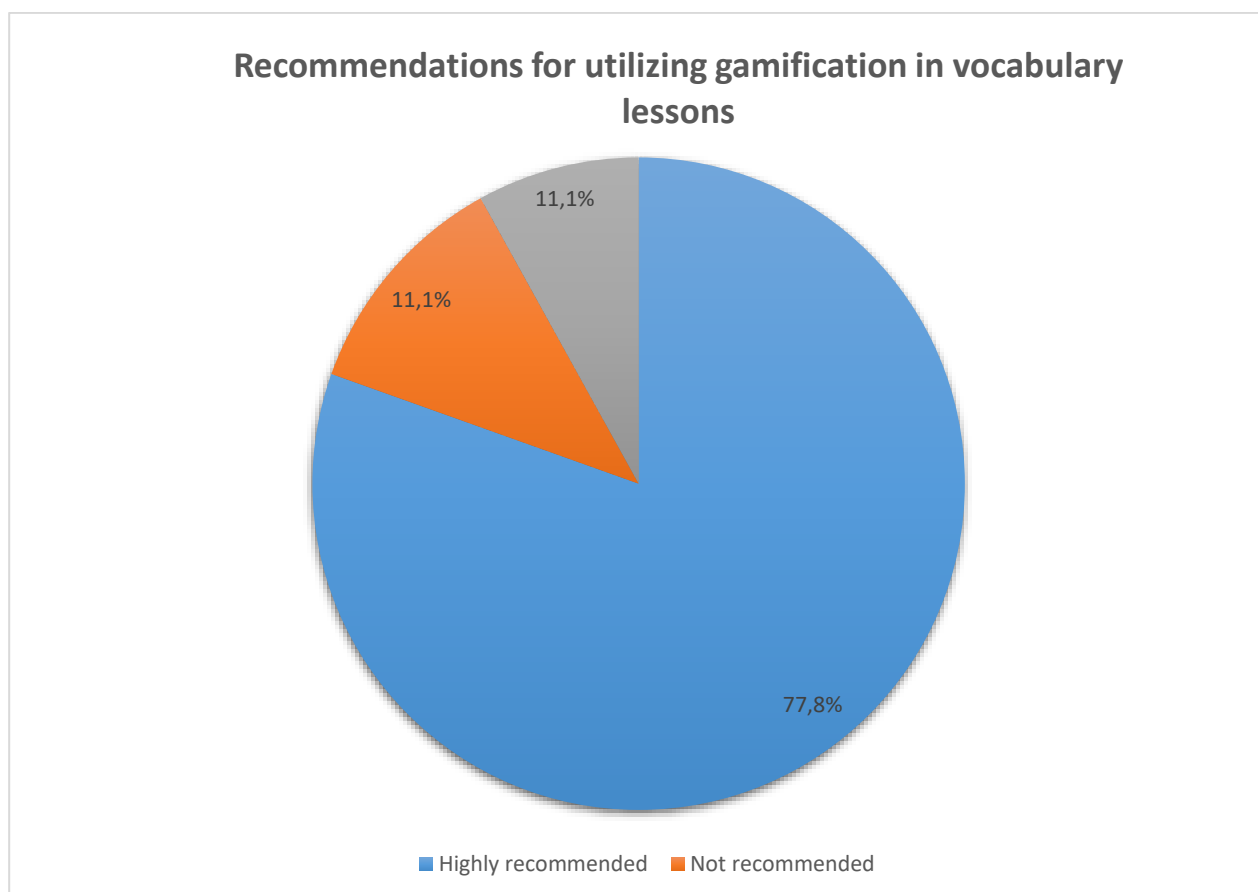


Figure 2: Recommendations for utilizing gamification in secondary school vocabulary lessons



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The pie chart presents the overall level of participant endorsement regarding the use of gamification as a vocabulary teaching strategy in secondary school EFL classrooms. An overwhelming 77.8% of the surveyed individuals (representing 14 out of 18 total respondents) highly recommended integrating gamified activities, heavily citing their practical effectiveness in increasing vocabulary retention, boosting learner confidence, and creating an enjoyable and interactive learning environment. Conversely, 11.1% expressed negative views concerning excessive competition and limited access to digital tools, while 11.1% remained undecided. This strong positive index underscores the pedagogical value of gamification as secondary school learners transition from passive vocabulary memorization toward active and meaningful language use.

6. Limitations and Future Scope of the Study

The generalizability of the findings in this study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the sample size consisted of 18 participants, among whom 16 were secondary school students and 2 were English language teachers. While this small-scale mixed-method approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of gamification practices in vocabulary instruction, the relatively small number of participants restricts the extent to which the results can be generalized to a wider population of secondary school learners. Larger-scale studies involving a greater number of respondents across different regions and school types would provide a more robust and reliable understanding of the topic.

Secondly, it is important to note that the participants were seventh-grade students from a single secondary school. As a result, the findings primarily reflect the attitudes, vocabulary development, and learning behaviors of a specific age group within a particular educational and cultural context. Future research could broaden the scope by including learners from various grade levels, different proficiency levels, and diverse geographical locations to enhance the applicability of the results.



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Thirdly, while this study focused on the direct implementation and motivational benefits of gamified vocabulary activities, it did not extensively account for the long-term impact of these methods on overall language proficiency and standardized test performance. Therefore, subsequent research could employ longitudinal designs to examine how the consistent use of gamification evolves and impacts learner autonomy, self-regulation, and vocabulary retention over time. Additionally, future studies could explore the perspectives of school administrators and parents to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the gamification environment in secondary school settings.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant role that gamification plays as an innovative instructional strategy in teaching vocabulary to secondary school students. The majority of participants expressed a strong preference for the use of game-based vocabulary activities, with digital tools such as Kahoot and Wordwall and non-digital activities such as Spelling Bee contests and Vocabulary Bingo emerging as the most effective approaches for encouraging active participation and supporting long-term vocabulary retention. In terms of pedagogical effectiveness, immediate feedback, reward systems, and competitive game elements were identified as essential tools that not only boost learners' motivation but also foster a deeper sense of engagement and responsibility toward their own vocabulary learning journey. Ultimately, transitioning from traditional, memorization-heavy vocabulary instruction to gamified learning creates a more enjoyable, interactive, and productive classroom environment. While acknowledging the limitations regarding sample size and duration, the study underscores that integrating gamification into the secondary school vocabulary curriculum provides a comprehensive and learner-centered approach to lexical development. Implementing these game-based strategies empowers educators to design more engaging and effective



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instructional activities, ensuring that vocabulary learning is both meaningful and motivating for secondary school learners.

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