

ABSTRACT

Exploring Young Learners' Experiences and Vocabulary Retention Through Gamification

Vocabulary acquisition and retention are essential aspects of English language learning, especially for young learners. However, many EFL learners experience difficulties in remembering newly learned vocabulary and often show limited engagement in conventional classroom activities. Therefore, this study aimed to find out young learners' experiences when participating in gamified activities to learn new vocabulary and to examine their vocabulary retention after participating in gamified activities over a period of tentative.

This study used a qualitative case study design involving fourth-grade students at a public primary school in Bandung. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with six students, and four delayed vocabulary tests administered over different intervals, including three tests one week after the intervention and the last test one month after the intervention. The data were analyzed using Creswell's qualitative data analysis procedures, while the delayed vocabulary test results were analyzed descriptively to identify vocabulary retention patterns.

The findings revealed that young learners generally had positive learning experiences during gamified activities. Students demonstrated active participation, enjoyment, motivation, and engagement, supported by meaningful visual activities, teacher guidance, and challenges integrated into the learning process. However, differences in emotional engagement, language ability, and peer support influenced how students participated in the activities. The findings also showed that vocabulary retention remained strong and relatively stable over time. Students retained concrete, frequently repeated, and thematically related vocabulary more effectively than abstract vocabulary and words with similar meanings. Repeated exposure, meaningful learning contexts, multisensory activities, and students' emotional and cognitive engagement contributed to successful vocabulary retention.

In conclusion, simple non-digital gamified activities can provide meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences while supporting vocabulary retention among young learners. These findings suggest that effective gamification in vocabulary learning does not necessarily require advanced technology but rather well-structured, supportive, and learner-centered classroom practices. Teachers are encouraged to use simple non-digital gamified activities in vocabulary instruction to create enjoyable and engaging learning experiences.

Keywords: *Gamification, Young Learners, Vocabulary Retention, Learning Experiences, EFL Vocabulary Learning*