

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery plays an essential role in English language learning, particularly for elementary school students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, in practice, some students still experience difficulties in mastering English vocabulary due to the use of monotonous teaching methods, making it challenging for teachers to sustain students' engagement throughout the learning process. This study aimed to explore how game-based learning was implemented in teaching English vocabulary to elementary EFL students and to examine the extent to which game-based learning activities engaged students in vocabulary learning. A qualitative case study design was employed involving one English teacher and 24 fifth-grade students at a public elementary school in Ciamis Regency, West Java, Indonesia. Data were collected through participatory classroom observations, supported by observation checklists and video recordings, as well as semi-structured interviews with one teacher and six students representing different levels of vocabulary achievement. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that game-based learning was implemented systematically through the opening, main, and closing stages of the lesson. The implementation encouraged students to demonstrate positive behavioral engagement, including paying attention to the teacher's explanations, following instructions, actively participating in individual and group activities, collaborating with peers, completing vocabulary-related tasks, and remaining engaged throughout the learning process. Interview findings further indicated that both the teacher and students perceived game-based learning as an enjoyable and meaningful instructional approach that enhanced students' motivation, confidence, participation, collaboration, and vocabulary retention, despite several challenges related to classroom management, lesson preparation, pronunciation, and differences in students' vocabulary abilities. Overall, this study concludes that game-based learning provides an effective instructional approach for teaching English vocabulary while fostering elementary EFL students' behavioral engagement in the learning process.