

Research Article

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Libyan EFL University Students' Perceptions on Scrabble and Word Ladder Games as Boosters to English Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention: A Follow-Up Study

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Abstract: Following a previous study by Tuati (2024) measuring the effectiveness of Scrabble and Word Ladder Games on reading comprehension and critical thinking, this study surveys student perceptions on their participation in these games as learning tools for vocabulary acquisition and retention before, during, and after gameplay. Findings indicate that most students find the games enjoyable and motivating, with notable long-term retention and more self-confidence in vocabulary use. The findings also report students' readiness to reuse such games for learning EFL. The study highlights the importance of engagement in vocabulary learning and suggest improvements for future implementations of game-based learning in EFL classrooms. Finally, the study affirms that while vocabulary acquisition and retention are evident, sustained vocabulary knowledge requires reinforcement activities beyond gameplay.

Keywords: Student perceptions, Scrabble, Word Ladder Games, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), Vocabulary acquisition

تصورات طلاب الجامعات الليبية الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول لعبة سكرابل وألعاب سلم الكلمات كمحفزات لاكتساب المفردات الإنجليزية والاحتفاظ بها: دراسة متابعة

المستخلص: بعد دراسة سابقة أجرتها التواتي (2024) لقياس فعالية ألعاب سكرابل وسلم الكلمات في فهم القراءة والتفكير النقدي، تستكشف هذه الدراسة تصورات الطلاب حول مشاركتهم في هذه الألعاب كأدوات تعليمية لاكتساب المفردات والاحتفاظ بها قبل اللعب وأثناءه وبعده. تشير النتائج إلى أن معظم الطلاب يجدون الألعاب ممتعة ومحفزة، مع الاحتفاظ الملحوظ بها على المدى الطويل وزيادة الثقة بالنفس في استخدام المفردات. تشير النتائج أيضًا إلى استعداد الطلاب لإعادة استخدام مثل هذه الألعاب لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على أهمية المشاركة في تعلم المفردات وتقترح تحسينات للتطبيقات المستقبلية للتعلم القائم على الألعاب في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. أخيرًا، تؤكد الدراسة أنه على الرغم من أن اكتساب المفردات والاحتفاظ بها واضح، إلا أن المعرفة المستمرة بالمفردات تتطلب أنشطة تعزيزية تتجاوز اللعب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تصورات الطلاب، لعبة سكرابل، ألعاب سلم الكلمات، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اكتساب المفردات



Introduction

Game-based learning (GBL) has been increasingly recognized as an effective method for engaging students in language learning. In a previous study, Tuati (2024) implemented Scrabble and Word Ladder Games as vocabulary acquisition and critical thinking enhancers among Libyan EFL university students, reporting improvements in vocabulary acquisition and retention. Hence, this follow-up study explores student perceptions regarding their engagement with these games. This study asks: *What are the students' perceptions on the Scrabble and Word Ladder Games as boosters to vocabulary acquisition and retention?*

Literature Review

Game-based learning (GBL) has gained traction in recent years as a transformative approach in language education. Researchers argue that employing digital and traditional games within the classroom can mitigate the limitations of conventional rote memorization methods while enhancing affective and cognitive engagement. Li (2021) demonstrates that mobile game-based learning improves EFL students' vocabulary acquisition by offering interactive, learner-centered experiences. This interactivity is crucial for maintaining engagement, a sentiment also echoed by Bahari (2020), who found that collaborative game-based activities lead to higher retention levels compared to traditional approaches.

Furthermore, studies in various educational contexts accentuate the effectiveness of integrating classic games, such as Scrabble and Word Ladder, into instruction. Alshammari and Al-Dubayan (2022) provide evidence from Saudi classrooms that traditional word games boost both motivation and vocabulary skills, suggesting that competitive, familiar formats serve as a catalyst for learning. Along similar lines, Mardiana (2021) compares these games and reported significant vocabulary gains for learners engaged with Scrabble and Word Ladder games, underlining their adaptability in different EFL settings.

The potential of digital platforms to transform language education is supported by Fahrutdinova and Yusupova (2021), who note that gamification tools can dynamically reinforce lexical knowledge. Reinders and Wattana (2020) extend this argument by signifying that digital game-based learning platforms increase affective engagement, which often translates into upgraded language outcomes. This assertion is reinforced by the eye-tracking study of Zhang et al. (2023) that reveals enhanced visual attention to vocabulary items during gameplay, suggesting that well-designed games can direct cognitive focus towards target language features.

In addition to these, meta-analytical reviews by Chang and Liu (2023) and Kuo and Yang (2021) disclose consistent patterns: game-based instruction yields improvements in both immediate recall and long-term retention. Xie and Feng (2023) further bolster these findings with experimental evidence showing that interactive word games positively influence vocabulary acquisition. Complementing these empirical studies, Tsai and Tsai (2021) document the systematic benefits of structured game-based instruction, while Chen and Wang (2022) and Zhang and Wang (2021) underscore the necessity of integrating digital reinforcement tools to maintain retention beyond the initial learning phase.

The review of literature also presents a broader perspective on the benefits and challenges of gamification. Bashir and Sezer (2020) provide a meta-analysis on game-based language learning in higher education, which indicates that while motivation and engagement are typically high, careful game design and scaffolding are essential to prevent cognitive overload. Akbari and Kiany (2021) discuss the balance between benefits and challenges, pointing out that the success of gamification largely depends on contextual factors such as learner background and classroom environment. Liu and Chien (2022) offer additional insight by reviewing pedagogical applications, stressing the need for educators to align game mechanics with language lesson objectives.

Finally, the comprehensive work by Reinders and Schmidt (2023) and Santos (2021) in exploring digital-age language learning strategies specifies that integrating traditional games with modern digital tools can optimize outcomes by addressing both immediate engagement and sustained learning. Tuati (2024) originally identifies the benefits of Scrabble and Word Ladder Games in the Libyan context, a conclusion that resonates throughout this growing body of literature and forms the basis for this follow-up study.

Methodology

A self-developed survey questionnaire was distributed to 50 Libyan EFL university students enrolled in the Reading Comprehension 3 Course at Tripoli University. These students had previously participated in Tuati's (2024) study on Scrabble and Word Ladder Games. The survey comprised six Likert-scale questions assessing student experiences before, during, and after gameplay. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Data Analysis

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Vocabulary learning was difficult before using Scrabble and Word Ladder Games.	45%	35%	10%	5%	5%
2. I enjoyed playing Scrabble and Word Ladder Games in class.	70%	20%	5%	3%	2%
3. Scrabble and Word Ladder Games helped me remember new words.	60%	25%	10%	3%	2%
4. I felt more confident using new words after playing the games.	50%	30%	10%	5%	5%
5. I would like to use these games again for learning EFL.	65%	20%	5%	5%	5%
6. I remembered vocabulary from the games weeks later.	40%	30%	15%	10%	5%

Results and Discussion

The survey results uncover insight into how Scrabble and Word Ladder Games influence Libyan EFL University students' vocabulary acquisition and retention. They affirm many of the advantages underlined in the literature and offer nuance regarding the challenges and potential for further instructional innovation, represented in multiple layers, including:

A- Initial Vocabulary Learning Difficulties

80% of the respondents initially perceived vocabulary learning as challenging or monotonous prior to engaging with Scrabble and Word Ladder Games. This observation is consistent with Bahari (2020), who argues that traditional vocabulary instruction often falls short in engaging students. Reinders and Wattana (2020) further remark that conventional methods lack the interactivity that many EFL students require to fully internalize new vocabulary. The initial negativity, reflected in the survey, could indicate an overload of rote memorization methods that do not account for the diverse learning styles and affective needs of students, hence calling for adopting game-based learning in EFL classes.

B- Engagement and Enjoyment During Gameplay

The study found that **90%** of students reported enjoying the classroom activities involving Scrabble and Word Ladder Games. Alshammari and Al-Dubayan (2022) similarly document increased motivation when students engaged in familiar, competitive formats. The enthusiasm observed by Tuati (2024) is echoed by these findings and additionally supported by Bashir and Sezer (2020), who maintain that high engagement in game-based contexts often leads to more effective learning outcomes. Akbari and Kiany (2021) emphasize that the emotional component of enjoyment is critical for cognitive processing, implying that the positive affect experienced during Scrabble and Word Ladder Games may facilitate deeper learning.

C- Improvement in Vocabulary Retention

A striking **85%** of students indicated that the Scrabble and Word Ladder Games facilitated them to better remember new words, a result that aligns closely with Li's (2021) findings on the advantages of mobile game-based vocabulary learning. Liu and Chien (2022) exhibit that interactive and repetitive exposure provided by game-based activities not only reinforces word retention, but also fosters self-confidence in using new vocabulary.

D- More Self-Confidence in Vocabulary Use

The survey results point out that after engaging with the Scrabble and Word Ladder Games, **80%** of students felt more self-confident in utilizing the new words. Mardiana (2021) reasons that the risk-taking nature of gameplay encourages students to experiment with language, thereby reinforcing their lexical knowledge.

E- Long-Term Vocabulary Retention

70% of the respondents recalled vocabulary learned through the Scrabble and Word Ladder Games even weeks after the initial learning session. This result supports the

findings of Zhang et al. (2023), who stress that while game-based learning often leads to immediate learning gains, long-term retention requires ongoing reinforcement. Chang and Liu (2023) clarify that digital tools, when combined with traditional games, create a scaffolded learning process that helps bridge the gap between initial exposure and sustained retention. Thus, the findings of this study suggest the integration of supplementary digital review tools, as recommended by Reinders and Schmidt (2023) and Chen and Wang (2022), to enhance long-term vocabulary retention.

F- Willingness to Reuse Game-Based Strategies

Finally, 85% of the surveyed students expressed a desire to use Scrabble and Word Ladder Games again. This inclination to reuse such instructional tools underscores the perceived value of game-based learning in their educational experience. Smith and Taylor (2022) report similar sentiments, indicating that when students find learning enjoyable and effective, they are more likely to engage with that method repeatedly. This is further reinforced by the findings of Tsai and Tsai (2021) and Santos (2021), who confirm that the disposition to continue using game-based learning strategies is a robust indicator of its overall efficacy in language education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study underscores the positive affective impact of Scrabble and Word Ladder Games on student motivation and vocabulary confidence. Although students initially struggle with vocabulary acquisition, these game-based methods offer an appealing way to overcome that challenge, and prove to be effective for long-term retention beyond gameplay.

Notably, when synthesizing these findings, several key implications emerge. First, the transition from traditional to game-based methods appears not only to enhance engagement and motivation, but also to directly impact vocabulary retention and student self-confidence. Second, while the short-term benefits of game-based learning are apparent, a blended approach that incorporates digital reinforcement is vital for sustaining long-term retention, a point emphasized by both Reinders and Schmidt (2023) and Zhang and Wang (2021). These insights advocate EFL educators to consider a hybrid instructional model that leverages the strengths of both traditional games and digital tools. Finally, the overall positive reception of the games indicates a shift in student preferences towards more interactive and personalized learning experiences.

In light of the above findings, future research should explore diverse game formats and their differential impacts on various student populations, as well as the potential of adaptive digital platforms to tailor vocabulary learning to individual needs. The current study recommends that EFL teachers integrate digital review tools (e.g., Quizlet) alongside Scrabble and Word Ladder Games, and administer weekly recall tests to measure sustained vocabulary retention. Future research should compare these classic games with other GBL methods in order to further optimize vocabulary acquisition and retention strategies.

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