

Improving English Vocabulary Through Word Chain Game in an Inclusive School in Bandar Lampung

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Abstract:

Mastering vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language proficiency, however many students particularly those in inclusive classrooms. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of word chain games in improving vocabulary mastery in an inclusive learning environment. Employing a pre-experimental research design with a one-group pre-test and post-test, the study was conducted with 19 students from an inclusive school in Bandar Lampung. Data were obtained through vocabulary assessments and student response questionnaires, which were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. The results demonstrate a notable enhancement in students' vocabulary proficiency, as reflected in the increase in mean test scores from 66.4 in the pre-test to 79.5 in the post-test. Statistical evaluations, including the t-test and N-Gain test, validated the effectiveness of this intervention. Additionally, student feedback indicated a high level of engagement and enthusiasm, with 88.86% of participants expressing positive perceptions of the game's impact. The interactive structure of the word chain game promoted active participation, cognitive stimulation, and peer collaboration, making vocabulary learning more engaging and effective. These findings support prior research highlighting the advantages of game-based learning in language instruction. The study underscores the word chain game as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing vocabulary acquisition in inclusive educational settings.

Keywords: inclusive, vocabulary, word chain game.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of vocabulary as a crucial linguistic element is essential to achieving proficiency in the English language, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teaching English vocabulary presents unique challenges, particularly within inclusive classrooms. These classrooms, by their nature, encompass a diverse range of student profiles, including learners with special educational needs. The centrality of vocabulary acquisition to achieving genuine proficiency in English cannot be overstated. A rich and nuanced understanding of vocabulary serves as the indispensable foundation upon which communicative competence is constructed, permeating and informing all facets of language use, from the receptive skills of listening and reading to the productive skills of speaking and writing. However, the pedagogical landscape of vocabulary. Within this rich tapestry of learners, students with special educational needs often require carefully considered and differentiated instruction to ensure equitable access to vocabulary acquisition. This necessitates a nuanced understanding of diverse learning profiles and the implementation of targeted strategies that address the specific linguistic and cognitive needs of all learners, enabling them to effectively acquire, internalize, and deploy the vocabulary necessary for successful communication in English.

As such, vocabulary stands as one of the most vital components in mastering the English language. Vocabulary knowledge could be learned and presented to students by considering the students, learning objectives, learning situation, facilities choosing and implementing appropriate learning methods and the ability of teachers themselves to manage (Handayani, 2018). Several underlying issues contribute to the difficulty in achieving lexical proficiency in English. Mastering English as a foreign language presents a significant challenge for many learners, particularly in non-English-speaking countries where exposure to the language is limited (Maretha & Alrajafi, 2022). Unlike countries where English functions as a second language and is actively used in daily interactions, students in foreign-language contexts often struggle to acquire English vocabulary due to minimal real-life engagement and practice. This challenge has been further exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted traditional learning environments. As the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) continued its spread across the world, students faced limitations in vocabulary learning due to restricted access to face-to-face instruction, reduced language immersion opportunities, and an over-reliance on digital learning platforms that may not always provide an interactive or engaging experience (Huei et al., 2021).

The complexity of vocabulary acquisition itself adds another layer of difficulty to language learning. Naturally, learning vocabulary is not a simple process, as it involves not only memorizing words but also understanding their meanings, contextual usage, pronunciation, and grammatical functions (Surya, 2014). This multifaceted nature of vocabulary learning requires learners to engage with language in diverse ways, such as

through reading, listening, speaking, and writing. However, when students lack sufficient vocabulary knowledge, their ability to comprehend and produce language is significantly hindered. A limited vocabulary repertoire restricts their ability to grasp meaning from texts, communicate effectively, and construct coherent sentences, thereby impacting overall language proficiency (Lube & Nuraeni, 2020). Consequently, students may feel frustrated, demotivated, and even anxious about their English learning progress, further impeding their ability to retain new words.

Although learning vocabulary may seem like a straightforward task, many students struggle with memorization and retention. This struggle is often attributed to ineffective learning strategies, a lack of exposure to authentic language materials, and the perception that learning English vocabulary is monotonous (Oktadela et al., 2023). Many students assume that studying English is a tedious and overwhelming process, particularly when lessons are delivered in a repetitive and uninspiring manner. This perception leads to a decline in motivation, making it even more challenging for learners to engage actively in vocabulary learning activities. Vocabulary is very essential but it is the first thing to be considered if speaking takes place in very early stages (Gali Alrajafi, Yulia Wahyuningsih, 2022). Without engaging and meaningful learning experiences, students may fail to retain newly acquired words, resulting in slow progress and a sense of discouragement.

Given these challenges, it is crucial to develop effective strategies that make vocabulary learning more engaging, interactive, and sustainable. Educators and curriculum designers must explore innovative teaching methods that integrate contextual learning, multimedia resources, and student-centered approaches to enhance vocabulary acquisition. By fostering a more dynamic and stimulating language learning environment, students can develop stronger language skills, ultimately leading to improved language comprehension and communication abilities.

The strategic use of games within the educational context, particularly in language acquisition, serves a crucial pedagogical function. Rather than simply providing entertainment, gamification aims to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment, thereby counteracting the potential for student disengagement and boredom that can often hinder the learning process. By injecting an element of fun and friendly competition, games can motivate students to actively participate and interact with the target language, fostering a more positive and receptive attitude towards learning. This is particularly true in the context of speaking classes, where the development of oral fluency and communicative competence is paramount. The "word chain" game, for example, is a particularly applicable activity within a speaking class focused on descriptive text (Firmansyah, 2015). This type of game encourages students to think creatively and spontaneously, building upon previously provided vocabulary and grammatical structures to generate new sentences or descriptions. The word chain game not only reinforces vocabulary acquisition and grammatical accuracy but also promotes fluency

and quick thinking, essential skills for effective oral communication. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of many games, including word chain, can foster a sense of teamwork and peer learning, creating a supportive and collaborative classroom atmosphere where students feel more comfortable taking risks and practicing their speaking skills. The playful and interactive nature of games, therefore, serves as a valuable tool for educators seeking to create a more stimulating and effective language learning experience, ultimately contributing to improved student motivation and language proficiency.

Word chain is a well-known game where the players have to mention a thing based on a simultaneous chosen theme and has been used in many languages' classes for a long time (Muhammad et al., 2022). The enduring popularity of the word chain game derives from its efficacy in reinforcing vocabulary acquisition, fostering fluency development, and cultivating rapid cognitive processing within an engaging and interactive framework. It provides a practical application of acquired vocabulary, transcending rote memorization and promoting a more dynamic and contextualized utilization of the target language.

While existing research has extensively explored vocabulary acquisition in general classroom settings, there remains a pressing need to investigate effective methodologies tailored for inclusive learning environments. Vocabulary learning extends beyond mere memorization; it involves understanding word meanings, contextual applications, pronunciation, and syntactic roles.

This research distinguishes itself through its novel conceptualization of the word chain game, not simply as a supplementary classroom exercise, but as a strategically deployed pedagogical innovation specifically tailored to the nuanced demands of inclusive learning contexts. While the word chain game possesses demonstrable efficacy in general language instruction, its potential as a vehicle for differentiated instruction within heterogeneous classrooms remains comparatively underexplored. The novelty of this study resides in its focused examination of how this game can be adapted and implemented to effectively facilitate vocabulary acquisition for learners exhibiting diverse learning modalities, cognitive capacities, and linguistic proficiencies. Rather than merely advocating for the game's generalized application, this research delves into the practical implementation of the word chain game as a scaffolding mechanism, analyzing how it can be structurally modified and adapted to address the idiosyncratic needs of individual learners within an inclusive pedagogical setting. Furthermore, this study endeavors to bridge the divide between theoretical frameworks of inclusive pedagogy and concrete classroom practices. By grounding its investigation in established tenets of differentiated instruction and universal design for learning, this research furnishes tangible strategies for educators seeking to cultivate more accessible and engaging vocabulary acquisition experiences for all learners. Ultimately, this novel perspective contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive language education by

providing practical, evidence-based recommendations for leveraging gamification to optimize vocabulary acquisition within diverse learning environments.

2. METHOD

This research is classified as experimental, a methodology designed to isolate and measure the impact of a specific treatment. According to Sugiyono at (Mannahali et al., 2024) pre-experimental design is a type of experiment that does not involve a control class, and the sample is not randomly selected. The form of pre-experimental design used is a one-group pre-test post-test group design. The research included the entire group of 19 students from the fall semester at an inclusive school in Bandar Lampung.

The word chain game functions as the independent variable, conceptualized as a pedagogical strategy employed in the vocabulary acquisition process within an inclusive classroom setting. Conversely, vocabulary proficiency constitutes the dependent variable.

The research utilized test and questionnaire as primary instrument. Both pre-tests and post-tests were administered to assess the variance in outcomes before and after the intervention. The assessment comprised a series of multiple-choice questions designed to evaluate English vocabulary proficiency. The questionnaire employed to assess respondents' perceptions regarding the implementation of the Word Chain Game in vocabulary acquisition.

The acquired data underwent inferential statistical analysis to assess the mean scores prior to and following the treatment. Furthermore, a t-test was employed to examine the efficacy of the word chain game in enhancing vocabulary mastery, while the N-Gain test was utilized to quantify the degree of improvement in students' learning outcomes as a result of the treatment. All data analysis procedures were conducted utilizing the SPSS statistical software, ensuring a systematic and precise examination of the research findings. Meanwhile, the data acquired from student response questionnaires were processed using a descriptive statistical approach to assess practicality. This analysis adhered to the evaluative framework proposed by Hobri at (Mannahali et al., 2024), which outlines the following criteria:

Table 1. Students' Response Criteria

Value	Description
$85\% \leq R$	Very positive
$70\% \leq R < 85\%$	Positive $50\% \leq R < 70\%$ Less positive
$R < 50\%$	Not positive

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from observations and interviews with both students and teachers indicate that, fundamentally, students at School X have integrated English into their classroom environment. They have demonstrated an understanding of English greetings and are able to use expressions of permission in certain contexts. English speakers have a smart and international personal image, so the use of English continues to increase (Alrajafi, 2021). Although English is not the primary language of instruction, the English teacher reported that some students exhibit a keen interest in learning the language. This suggests a positive inclination toward English proficiency and language acquisition.

Excerpt 1

I think learning vocab is important so that I can talk in English. I can talk to foreigners in English. Then I can go abroad using English.

Excerpt 2

I've never been to America, I want to go there someday. To see the statue of liberty. So I have to be able to speak English so I don't get confused at the airport. You see, my mom said that international airplanes use English.

Excerpt 3

I was born in Lampung, so I can't speak English. I want to be able to speak English but I still have very little vocabulary. I want to be an English teacher.

Excerpt 4

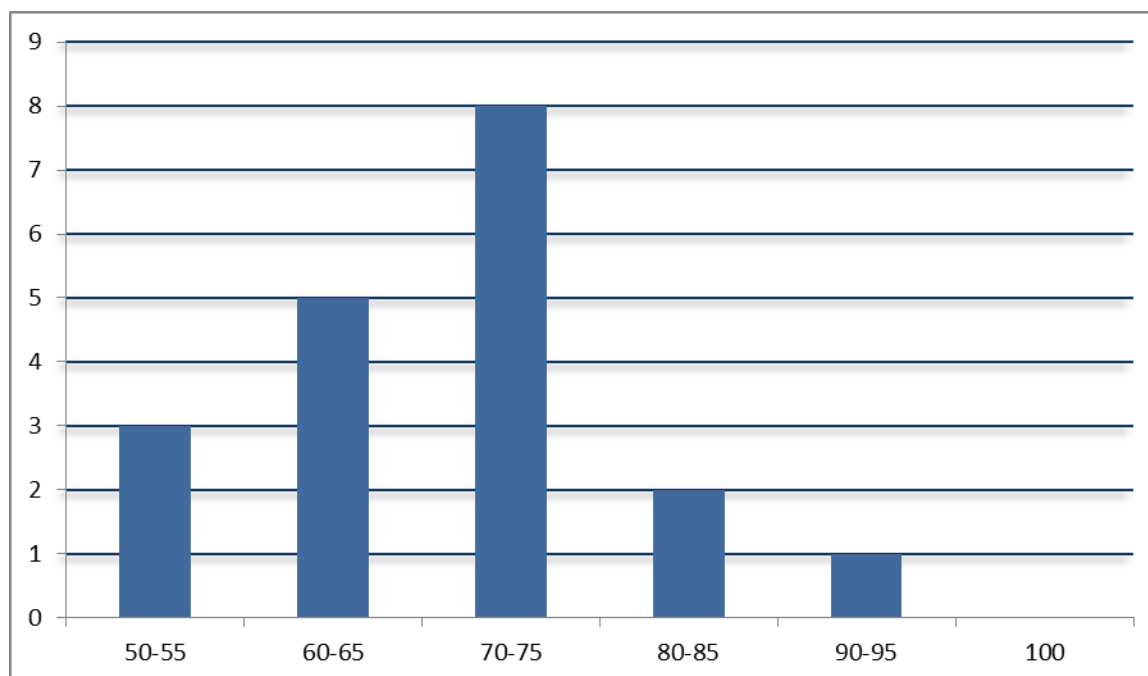
I am an English teacher, in our school we have introduced English in the learning process. This is because we fully understand that the role of English in the era of global competition is vital, so we must equip them with English. we want to provide a strong foundation in English language skills. vocabulary is a basic part of communicating in English, so special attention is needed in the learning process. Especially in inclusive schools where there are some of our students who have certain limitations. So sometimes we find obstacles in introducing new vocabulary. One of the reasons is that although they realize that English is an important language, sometimes learning English can also be boring, especially if English is placed at the end of the lesson.

Students' engagement in vocabulary mastery reflects a notable level of interest, driven by diverse aspirations that necessitate proficiency in English. To support this, English educators have made efforts to integrate English instruction within the learning process, even if it is not the primary language of instruction. Despite these initiatives, insights from interviews with English teachers reveal a significant challenge namely, a decline in students' motivation to learn English, particularly during specific periods of the school day.

The Effectiveness of Word Chain Games in Improving Vocabulary Mastery

To assess the efficacy of this game in enhancing vocabulary acquisition within inclusive classrooms, a comparative analysis of pre-test and post-test scores serves as a key indicator. The observed shifts in proficiency, resulting from the applied intervention, constitute a crucial criterion in determining the game's viability as an effective tool for vocabulary development.

Diagram 1. Frequency Distribution of Vocabulary Pre-Test



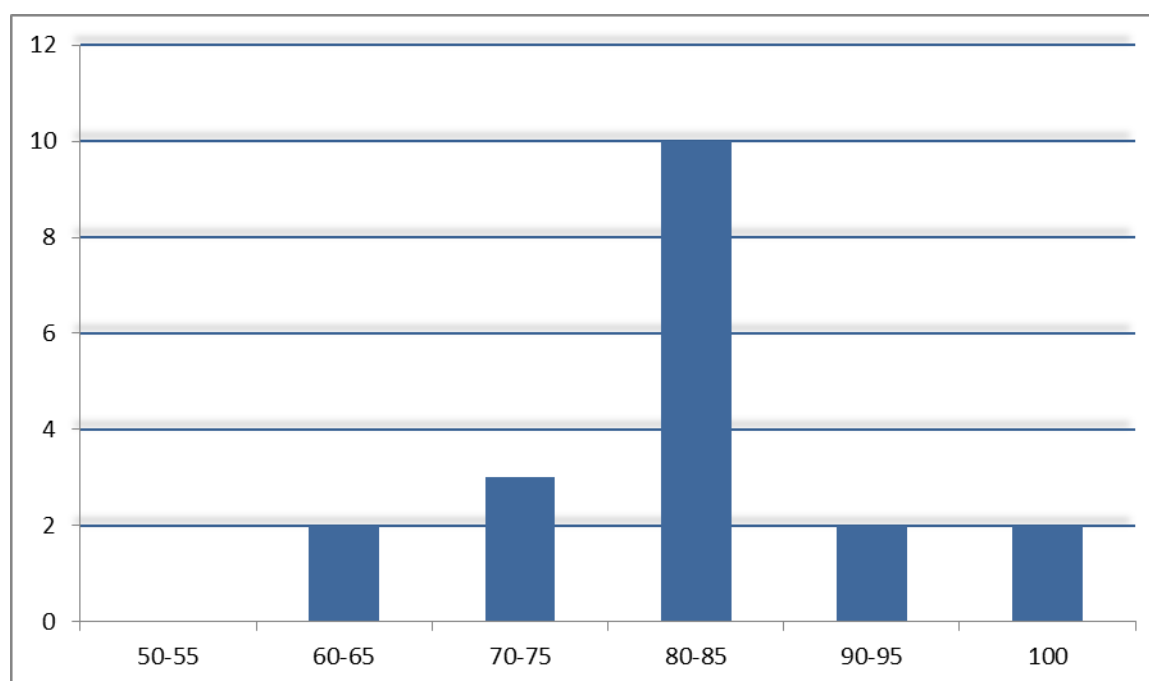
The chart above depicts the respondents' vocabulary mastery levels as assessed in the pre-test, serving as an initial evaluation to measure their proficiency prior to any instructional intervention. The data indicate that three respondents scored within the 50-55 range, while five participants achieved scores between 60-65. Furthermore, eight respondents demonstrated stronger performance, obtaining scores between 70-75. Additionally, two participants attained scores ranging from 80-85, whereas only one respondent secured a score within the 90-95 range. Notably, none of the respondents achieved the highest possible score on the pre-test.

Following the administration of a series of pre-tests to assess students' initial vocabulary knowledge, researchers implemented an instructional treatment that incorporated a game-based learning approach into the vocabulary acquisition process. Specifically, the word chain game was strategically employed during the teaching and learning sessions to create an engaging and interactive environment, encouraging active student participation and reinforcing word retention. This approach was particularly relevant in an inclusive classroom

setting, where diverse learning needs and abilities required innovative and adaptable teaching strategies to ensure effective vocabulary development.

To determine the impact of this pedagogical intervention, researchers systematically measured students' progress by comparing post-test results with their pre-test scores. This comparative analysis aimed to provide empirical evidence regarding the extent to which the word chain game contributed to improving students' vocabulary mastery. Additionally, statistical tests, such as the t-test and N-Gain test, were utilized to quantify the significance of the learning improvement and gauge the effectiveness of the treatment. By incorporating these analytical methods, the study aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the role of game-based learning in fostering vocabulary acquisition and its potential application in inclusive educational settings. The subsequent section presents the post-test findings.

Diagram 2. Frequency Distribution of Vocabulary Post-Test



The diagram reveals that none of the respondents secured scores within the 50-55 range. A modest number, precisely two individuals, attained scores between 60-65, while three respondents fell within the 70-75 bracket. Notably, a significant proportion, totaling ten participants, achieved scores ranging from 80 to 85. Meanwhile, two respondents attained scores within the 90-95 range, and an equivalent number reached the pinnacle of performance with a flawless score of 100.

Table2. Data Analysis of Pre-Test and Post-test

Scores	Data Description	
	Pre-test	Post-test
Number of Subjects (N)	19	19
Mean (M)	66,4	79,5
Standard of Deviation	17.52	68.22
Ranges	40	40
Maximum Scores	90	100
Minimum Scores	50	60

Table above presents the analysis of pre-test and post-test data, illustrating the changes in students' vocabulary mastery before and after the implementation of the word chain game as a learning strategy. The study involved 19 participants, as indicated by the consistent number of subjects (N) in both tests. The mean score increased from 66.4 in the pre-test to 79.5 in the post-test, demonstrating an overall improvement in students' vocabulary acquisition after the treatment.

The standard deviation rose from 17.52 in the pre-test to 68.22 in the post-test, suggesting greater variability in students' scores after the intervention. This implies that while some students showed significant improvement, others experienced a more moderate increase. The range of scores remained constant at 40, indicating that the difference between the highest and lowest scores did not change, despite the overall increase in performance.

Additionally, the maximum score improved from 90 in the pre-test to 100 in the post-test, suggesting that at least one student achieved a perfect score after the treatment. The minimum score also increased from 50 to 60, reflecting an improvement even among the lowest-performing students.

Table 3. Normalized Gain Classification

Vocab assessed	Average	Average	<i>N-Gain</i>	Classification
	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test</i>		
Experiment	66,4	79,5	0,39	Moderate

Overall, the data suggests that integrating the word chain game into vocabulary instruction had a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. The increase in both maximum and minimum scores, along with the higher average score, indicates that most students benefited from the intervention. However, the rise in standard deviation suggests variations in individual learning progress, indicating that some students improved more significantly than others.

Following the implementation of the word chain game as a vocabulary enrichment strategy, participants reported a significant expansion of their lexical knowledge through peer interaction. They engaged in the game with enthusiasm, expressing genuine enjoyment throughout the learning process. The dynamic nature of this activity fostered both critical and creative thinking, allowing students to explore language in a more interactive and stimulating manner. Additionally, the game served as a cognitive exercise, sharpening their ability to think swiftly and make precise decisions under time constraints. Given these observed benefits, a structured inquiry was conducted to gather participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of this game within the teaching and learning framework.

Excerpt 5

I think the vocabulary game is fun, so the class is exciting. I'm happy with this game.

Excerpt 6

The game is fun, but it's more fun if there's a prize, so I can be more enthusiastic. Because when we play games, we usually get prizes.

Quotation 7

As a teacher, I feel helped by the existence of learning strategies like this because, this strategy can be applied to the inclusion class. I see that children really enjoy this game until they don't realize that they are learning. by using games in learning, this will increase their learning motivation.

The effectiveness of the Word Chain Game in enhancing vocabulary acquisition was also evaluated through a student response questionnaire administered post-treatment. The intervention is considered effective if the average student response rate reaches a minimum threshold of 70%, categorizing it as either positive ($70\% \leq R < 85\%$) or highly positive ($R \geq 85\%$). The analysis of the collected questionnaire data revealed that 88.86% of students responded positively. Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Word Chain Game is an effective strategy for improving vocabulary mastery.

The effectiveness of the Word Chain Game in enhancing vocabulary acquisition is supported by various research findings. This study demonstrates that 88.86% of students responded positively to the implementation of this game, indicating its substantial impact on vocabulary mastery. The results are consistent with previous studies that highlight the advantages of game-based learning strategies in promoting language acquisition. Games create an engaging learning environment that encourages active participation, fosters motivation, and enhances retention. The Word Chain Game specifically facilitates vocabulary expansion by requiring students to construct words sequentially, reinforcing their lexical knowledge through repeated exposure and cognitive engagement.

Several studies provide empirical evidence supporting the benefits of this pedagogical approach. The word chain game in vocabulary instruction and found that this method significantly contributed to students' lexical development (Muhammad et al., 2022). The research emphasized that the structured application of this game, particularly through word formation based on dictionary references and sequential letter patterns, played a crucial role in improving students' vocabulary skills. The use of the word chain game in an Islamic junior high school and reported that students exhibited increased enthusiasm and motivation in learning new vocabulary (Agustine et al., 2023). The interactive nature of the game created a dynamic classroom atmosphere that facilitated a deeper understanding of word meanings and their contextual applications.

Further evidence supporting the effectiveness of the word chain game is provided, who conducted a study on eighth-grade students at one of junior school in Pekanbaru (Abbas, 2014). The study revealed that after implementing this game, students' average vocabulary test scores improved to 81.2, indicating a substantial enhancement in their lexical competence. The game also contributed to a more engaging and enjoyable learning experience, as students actively participated in the process of discovering and constructing words. This aligns with the fundamental principles of active learning, which suggest that meaningful engagement leads to higher retention and comprehension.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the Word Chain Game is an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. The research, conducted within an inclusive classroom setting, revealed a significant improvement in students' vocabulary acquisition, as evidenced by the comparative analysis of pre-test and post-test scores. The mean score increased from 66.4 in the pre-test to 79.5 in the post-test, indicating a notable enhancement in students' lexical proficiency. Additionally, the statistical analysis, including the t-test and N-Gain test, confirmed the effectiveness of the intervention. In different learning media, that was conducted by Silaban & Refika, 2017; Zahraa et al., (2023) that flyswatter game improve students' vocabulary mastery in short functional text.

Students' positive responses further reinforced the success of this game-based learning approach. The study found that 88.86% of participants responded favorably to the Word Chain Game, highlighting its ability to foster engagement, motivation, and active participation. The interactive nature of the game encouraged students to recall and apply vocabulary in a meaningful context, making the learning process more enjoyable and dynamic. Teachers also acknowledged the benefits of this strategy, particularly in an inclusive learning environment where students exhibit diverse abilities and learning needs.

Several key factors contribute to the success of the word chain game in vocabulary learning. First, it fosters active learning by engaging students in a process that requires critical thinking, word association, and memory recall. Second, the game promotes social interaction, allowing students to learn collaboratively and reinforce their knowledge through peer engagement. Third, the inclusion of a competitive element sustains students' interest, making vocabulary acquisition more stimulating and effective. In light of the research findings, several strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance the efficacy

of the word chain game as a pedagogical tool for vocabulary acquisition within inclusive educational settings. First, educators are strongly encouraged to integrate game-based learning methodologies, particularly the word chain game, into their instructional repertoire to cultivate heightened student engagement and motivation. Empirical evidence underscores the effectiveness of this approach in facilitating vocabulary mastery while fostering an interactive and intellectually stimulating learning environment. To maximize its pedagogical impact, instructors must ensure that the game is meticulously structured and seamlessly aligned with curricular objectives, thereby enabling students to acquire vocabulary in a systematic and meaningful manner.

Second, the implementation of the word chain game necessitates a nuanced and adaptive approach to accommodate the diverse cognitive and linguistic profiles of students, particularly in inclusive classrooms. Educators should adopt differentiated instructional techniques by modifying the complexity of the game, incorporating scaffolding mechanisms, and ensuring equitable participation opportunities. Such adaptations are consistent with the tenets of inclusive pedagogy, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their abilities, can effectively engage in vocabulary acquisition.

The effectiveness of the word chain game can be attributed to several key factors. First, it promotes an active learning approach by involving students in the process of word discovery rather than passive memorization. Second, it creates a collaborative environment in which students interact with peers, exchange knowledge, and reinforce their learning through social interaction. Third, the game introduces an element of challenge and excitement, which sustains students' interest and motivation. These factors collectively contribute to the improvement of vocabulary mastery and overall language proficiency.

In conclusion, the findings of this study align with previous research emphasizing the role of interactive and game-based strategies in language learning. The word chain game has been shown to be an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition, particularly in fostering active engagement and sustained motivation among students. Its implementation in classroom instruction provides an innovative and enjoyable approach to vocabulary learning, making it a valuable pedagogical strategy for language educators.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study confirms that the word chain game is a valuable instructional tool for improving students' vocabulary proficiency. It provides a structured yet engaging approach to vocabulary learning, ensuring that students are actively involved in their language development. Given its effectiveness, educators are encouraged to incorporate game-based learning strategies into their teaching methodologies to enhance students' motivation and language acquisition. Future research may explore the long-term impact of this approach on students' overall language proficiency and its adaptability across different educational contexts.

The researchers suggest to further researcher should extend the scope of inquiry to examine the longitudinal impact of the word chain game on vocabulary retention. While the present study substantiates its immediate efficacy, further empirical investigations are warranted to ascertain the durability of vocabulary acquisition over extended periods. Additionally, scholars should explore the potential synergistic effects of integrating the Word Chain Game with complementary instructional strategies, such as multimedia-assisted learning and collaborative peer engagement, to further amplify its pedagogical value.

Educational institutions and policymakers must play a pivotal role in supporting the implementation of innovative teaching methodologies by investing in professional development initiatives for educators. Training programs should be designed to equip teachers with the requisite skills to effectively implement game-based learning strategies and tailor them to the heterogeneous needs of their students. Institutional endorsement and resource allocation are essential to ensure the sustainable adoption of engaging and student-centered vocabulary instruction.

Finally, students should be encouraged to extend vocabulary learning beyond the formal classroom setting by integrating word-based games into their everyday linguistic interactions and independent study routines. The utilization of technological platforms, including mobile applications and digital learning tools that incorporate word-chain-based activities, can further augment lexical acquisition and retention, reinforcing the learning experience in a dynamic and self-directed manner.

By implementing these recommendations, educators, researchers, and policymakers can refine vocabulary instruction through innovative and interactive methodologies, ultimately enhancing students' linguistic proficiency and communicative competence in English.

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