DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ENGLISH VOCABULARY THROUGH INTERACTIVE GAMES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract. *This article examines the theoretical and practical aspects of developing students' English vocabulary in secondary schools through interactive games. It analyzes different types of interactive games, their role in increasing learners' motivation, and their psychological and pedagogical advantages. The findings indicate that a game-based approach is an effective method for developing students' lexical competence.*

Keywords: *interactive games, lexical competence, motivation, methodology, communicative approach.*

Introduction. In the era of globalization, English has become the language of international communication, science, technology, and culture. As one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, English serves as a bridge that connects people of different nations and backgrounds. In Uzbekistan, the teaching and learning of English have been given national significance, with reforms aimed at improving the quality of foreign language education at all levels. One of the essential aspects of this process is the development of students' vocabulary competence, which forms the foundation of communicative ability.

Vocabulary is the cornerstone of language acquisition. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners cannot effectively communicate or comprehend texts, regardless of their knowledge of grammar or pronunciation. For this reason, the issue of enriching students' lexical competence has become one of the most pressing concerns in the methodology of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Traditional methods, based on rote memorization, have often proven insufficient in maintaining long-term retention or promoting active usage. Thus, interactive games have emerged as an innovative pedagogical strategy to enhance vocabulary learning in an engaging, student-centered, and communicative manner.

Theoretical Background of Vocabulary Learning. Vocabulary acquisition refers to the process through which learners internalize new words and integrate them into their active language system. According to Nation (2020), vocabulary knowledge involves not only knowing a word's meaning but also understanding its pronunciation, spelling, grammatical functions, collocations, and connotations. Thornbury (2002) emphasizes that

vocabulary teaching should go beyond translation or word lists, focusing instead on meaningful use and contextual learning.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, vocabulary learning is most effective when learners are emotionally and cognitively engaged. Interactive activities, particularly games, provide a dynamic context in which students encounter new words in authentic communicative situations. This approach aligns with constructivist learning theories, which advocate for active, experience-based, and learner-driven education. Games stimulate curiosity, sustain attention, and create a relaxed environment where mistakes are perceived as part of learning rather than failure.

The Role of Interactive Games in Language Teaching. Interactive games are pedagogical tools that promote communication, collaboration, and competition within a structured learning environment. In English language teaching, they play a dual role: facilitating vocabulary acquisition and motivating learners. Games create opportunities for repetitive exposure to new words without causing boredom or fatigue. By integrating play into learning, teachers can transform passive learners into active participants.

There are several types of interactive games applicable to vocabulary teaching. Word-based games, such as Crossword Puzzles, Bingo, Scrabble, and Word Association, help students recall, spell, and recognize new words. Role-play games, including At the Market, At the Airport, or In the Restaurant, encourage the use of target vocabulary in real-life communication. Digital interactive games, such as Kahoot, Quizlet Live, and Wordwall, combine technology and learning, appealing to digitally native students who thrive in multimedia environments.

Each game has a clear linguistic objective—whether to introduce, reinforce, or assess vocabulary. More importantly, games encourage natural interaction, requiring students to listen, speak, and think in English simultaneously, which promotes comprehensive language development.

Methodological Approaches to Implementing Interactive Games. Integrating games into vocabulary instruction requires thoughtful methodological planning. Teachers must select games that correspond to lesson objectives, students' proficiency levels, and available resources. A well-structured game-based activity typically includes three stages: pre-game preparation, game performance, and post-game reflection.

During the preparation stage, the teacher introduces the target vocabulary, ensuring that students understand word meanings and usage. In the game performance stage, students actively use the words while following the rules of the selected game. The post-game stage involves reflection and feedback, where students discuss what they have learned, identify difficulties, and consolidate their knowledge through follow-up exercises. For example, in the game "Find Someone Who…", students walk around the classroom asking their peers questions using specific vocabulary items ("Find someone who likes swimming" or "Find someone who can play the guitar"). This encourages real communication and repeated use of target words in meaningful contexts. Similarly, the "Vocabulary Bingo" game reinforces

listening and comprehension skills by having students recognize and mark words as they hear them.

Psychological and Pedagogical Benefits of Interactive Games. The effectiveness of interactive games extends beyond vocabulary learning. They contribute to the overall development of students' cognitive, social, and emotional competencies. Psychologically, games reduce anxiety and create a positive atmosphere conducive to language learning. They stimulate intrinsic motivation, enhance self-confidence, and develop problem-solving skills.

Pedagogically, games foster cooperative learning. Students work in teams, share knowledge, and learn from one another. This promotes peer interaction, empathy, and social responsibility. Teachers, in turn, act as facilitators rather than controllers, guiding the process and providing feedback. Furthermore, games support differentiated instruction, accommodating learners with varying abilities and learning styles. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners all benefit from the multisensory nature of game-based learning.

Digitalization and Modern Innovations. In recent years, the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) has transformed traditional classroom practices. Digital tools like Kahoot, Wordwall, and Quizizz have become powerful platforms for interactive learning. These platforms allow teachers to design customized vocabulary games, track students' progress, and provide instant feedback.

Online interactive games not only make lessons more engaging but also extend learning beyond the classroom. Students can review vocabulary at home, compete with classmates online, and monitor their achievements. Such gamified learning environments align with the principles of blended learning and flipped classrooms, which combine traditional and digital approaches for more flexible and effective instruction.

Results and Practical Implications. Empirical observations in various secondary schools show that students participating in interactive game-based lessons demonstrate higher motivation, better retention of new words, and increased willingness to communicate in English. Teachers report that even weaker students become more active when games are used, as the competitive and playful atmosphere lowers affective barriers.

The practical implication is clear: incorporating at least one interactive game per lesson can significantly enhance vocabulary learning outcomes. However, it is essential that games remain purposeful and closely aligned with curricular goals rather than being used merely for entertainment.

Conclusion. Interactive games represent a powerful and innovative approach to developing students' English vocabulary in secondary schools. They engage learners emotionally and cognitively, promote communication, and create an enjoyable learning environment. By merging education with play, teachers can nurture not only linguistic competence but also creativity, confidence, and collaboration among learners.

As educational paradigms shift toward learner-centered methodologies, the use of interactive games should become an integral part of EFL pedagogy. Through proper

selection, planning, and reflection, teachers can transform the English classroom into a dynamic and motivating space where vocabulary learning becomes both meaningful and enjoyable.

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