

## Effectiveness of Using Game Techniques to Improve English Vocabulary Mastery in Elementary School: A Systematic Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect in English learning, especially at the elementary school level. However, many students still experience difficulties in mastering vocabulary optimally due to learning methods that are less interesting and not appropriate to their age characteristics. This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to look into how well game tactics can help elementary school students improve their command of English vocabulary. A total of 50 articles published from 2020 to 2025 from various sources using publish or perish were collected and analyzed according to predetermined both inclusion and exclusion standars. The study's findings indicate that game techniques have a favorable effect on enhancing vocabulary mastery, learning motivation, and active student engagement. Various types of games such as flash card, scrabble game, word game and wordwall have been demonstrated to be successful in aiding students in comprehending and rebember new vocabulary. However, there are also several obstacles such as limited time, facilities, and teachers' abilities in implementing game techniques optimally. The results of this investigation should be a reference for educators, researchers, and educational policy makers in developing more interesting and effective English learning methods at the elementary school level.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary learning, game techniques, English learning, teaching techniques, systematic literature review.

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### INTRODUCTION

Mastery of vocabulary is among the most crucial basic elements of learning English, especially for elementary school students who are part of the early stages of learning a foreign language. The ability to fully understand and apply a word's meaning in a language, which varies depending on the individual, class, or occupation, is known as vocabulary mastery (Gardner, 2010). English instruction in primary schools aims to improve students' communication skills and their comprehension of the language's nature and worth in order to make the nation more competitive in the global economy (Maulina et al., 2025).

One of the most crucial things to master is vocabulary. It holds key positions in the fields of teaching and education (Tiwi et al., 2021). Learning vocabulary is an important part of studying a foreign language, and it is often emphasized in textbooks and classes (Alqahtani, 2015). Vocabulary forms the foundation for language abilities like speaking, listening, both reading and writing.

One of the most crucial skills for students is having an adequate vocabulary, as English has become the most widely used language in global communication and is applied, including technology, education, politics, and business (Muhammad et al., 2024). Besides, vocabulary is one of fundamental components of a language, and having a strong vocabulary is essential for effective language learning (Dharmayasa, 2022). Master vocabulary is also the key to learning English, the larger a student's vocabulary, the easier it becomes for them to understand and use the language (August et al., 2025). It is in line with Palmer et al. (2024), they state that vocabulary mastery is an important stage for enhancing language proficiency. According to Yuliana et al. (2021), vocabulary is one of the most crucial skills that students should acquire when learning English. Nunan (2005, p.121) defines vocabulary as a person's collection of words essentially all the words and individual knows and uses. Similarly, Nurhidayah, (2018) emphasizes that learning a language is impossible without vocabulary. Without words, people may not be able to communicate when speaking a different language (Dilek & Yürük, 2013; Sanhas et al., 2025).

Since vocabulary affects how effectively students read, write, speak, and listen, it is a crucial component of language ability (Wilkins, 1997; Richards, 2002; Thornbury, 2002; Dwyer & Neuman, 2009). Mittal and Tathore (2015, p.3) say that "vocabulary is the basic tool of language which makes communication smooth among us". The employment of gaming techniques during the educational process is becoming more and more popular as a substitute to address this issue in tandem with the advancement of teaching methodologies. Nonetheless, there is currently a paucity of research that explicitly assesses how well gaming strategies work for teaching vocabulary in English at different educational levels. Since playing games can be both enjoyable and beneficial, they are among the best resources for teaching English to young students. According to studies, kids feel more at ease and less anxious when they play games while learning (Chayakorn et al., 2023). Anggraini (2021), concluded that the use of games to learn English is effective because games are entertaining and in accordance with the qualities of children as beginner learners. Besides that, games might help students expand their vocabulary. "Games are one method that can make students feel that certain words are important and necessary," claims Nurhayati (2015).

This study was designed to answer several main questions, namely: 1) How effective are game techniques in improving English vocabulary mastery in elementary school students based on the results of previous research? 2) What types of game techniques are used in acquiring vocabulary in English at the elementary school level? 3) What factors influence the success of implementing game techniques in learning English vocabulary based on previous research? The focus of this research is to systematically review and examine various previous research findings on the efficiency of game use techniques to get better English mastery of vocabulary in elementary school students. This study focuses on the extent of the impact of the game techniques on students' command of vocabulary and the types of games used in vocabulary learning contexts.

Previous studies have generally been empirical, using direct classroom experiments to test the effectiveness of specific game techniques on students' vocabulary mastery. These studies typically focused on a single game type, a single student group, and a specific context, such as school location, grade level, or specific vocabulary material. In contrast, this study differs by using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, which collects, sorts,

analyzes, and synthesizes dozens of previous studies in a structured and comprehensive manner. This approach, unlike any other, encompasses studies from various countries, time periods, and approaches. Furthermore, this study identifies general patterns, trends, and inconsistencies in previous research findings related to make use of game techniques in English vocabulary learning, providing a broad and comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of game techniques, based on existing evidence, not just the results of a single practical implementation. Although numerous studies have discussed the application of game techniques when instructing vocabulary in English, most of them are case studies or experiments limited to specific contexts. Few studies have systematically synthesized these findings to offer a thorough synopsis of the game's efficacy techniques when learning vocabulary at the elementary school level. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap through a systematic literature review approach.

## **METHOD**

A systematic review, often known as a systematic literature review (SLR), was used in this study. According to Purssell and McCrae (2020), a systematic review is a rigorous process for gathering and combining data from several research to create a whole that is superior to the sum of its parts. In this study, researchers used a content analysis as the primary method to analyze 50 selected scientific articles. Content analysis was selected due to its capacity to offer a thorough and organized summary of the content of the articles, particularly in investigating the degree to which the use of game techniques helps to English vocabulary mastery in elementary school students.

The analysis process was carried out by carefully reading important parts of each article, such as the title, abstract, methodology, results, and discussion, to identify relevant units of information. The data sources in this study came from articles published in various national and international journals available through databases such as ERIC, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Taylor & Francis Online. Selected articles must meet the inclusion criteria, namely: (1) published between 2020 and 2025, (2) discussing the use of game techniques when acquiring vocabulary in English, (3) focusing on elementary school students, and (4) written in English. Meanwhile, articles that do not meet these criteria, such as articles discussing other levels of education, not related to game techniques or vocabulary, or composed in languages outside English, was be excluded from the analysis. To maintain the validity and relevance of the data in this research, the researchers established standards for both inclusion and exclusion in the procedure for selecting articles for analysis. These criteria aim to ensure that all articles used truly align with the research focus, namely the efficiency of utilizing game techniques in improving vocabulary in English mastery in elementary school students.

Articles included were chosen for this investigation based on several inclusion criteria, such as year of publication, topic relevance, educational level, and availability of full access to the document. Conversely, articles that do not meet these criteria will be eliminated through exclusion criteria. Table 1 below provides specifics of the inclusion and criteria for exclusion:

TABLE 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in Research

Criteria for Inclusion	Criteria for Exclusion
Articles released from 2020 to 2025	Articles published before 2020
The primary emphasis is the application of game techniques in learning English vocabulary.	Articles that are not relevant to the topic of game techniques or vocabulary mastery
The research subjects were elementary school students.	The research subjects were not elementary school students, namely junior high school, high school, and university students.
Articles are written in English	Articles in Indonesian and articles with titles in other languages that cannot be understood
Articles have gone through a peer-review process or been published in accredited scientific journals.	Articles in the form of theses, dissertations, blogs, or non-scientific articles
The article can be accessed in full (full-text)	Articles that are only available in abstract form or cannot be downloaded

The data collection process was carried out through several stages, starting with determining search keywords such as "game techniques," "vocabulary learning," "elementary students," and "game-based learning." The articles found are then screened based on the suitability of the title, abstract, content, and inclusion-exclusion criteria. Articles that pass the selection are classified and organized using a reference management application such as publish or perish. Data that was gathered is then examined using a theme analysis approach. Articles were grouped into several clusters based on emerging themes, such as the type of game used, the impact of learning on students, the research method used, and the students' grade level. To maintain the validity and legitimacy of the study results, researchers triangulated sources by taking articles from various trusted journals and databases. Article quality was also assessed by considering whether the articles had undergone a peer-review process, presented a clear methodology, and had direct relevance to the research topic.

All findings were presented objectively and transparently, using the Watase Uake application (Watase.web.id). Watase.web.id is a web-based platform created to facilitate researchers working together on research. To ensure that the articles used in this study were truly relevant and appropriate to the topic discussed, the identification and selection process was carried out systematically with reference Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, or PRISMA, guidelines. This procedure included a number of stages, starting from the initial identification of articles through various databases, screening according to abstracts and titles, checking for qualifications based on complete texts, and finally selecting articles that met the criterion for inclusion and exclusion. The following PRISMA diagram shows the detailed article selection flow used in this study:

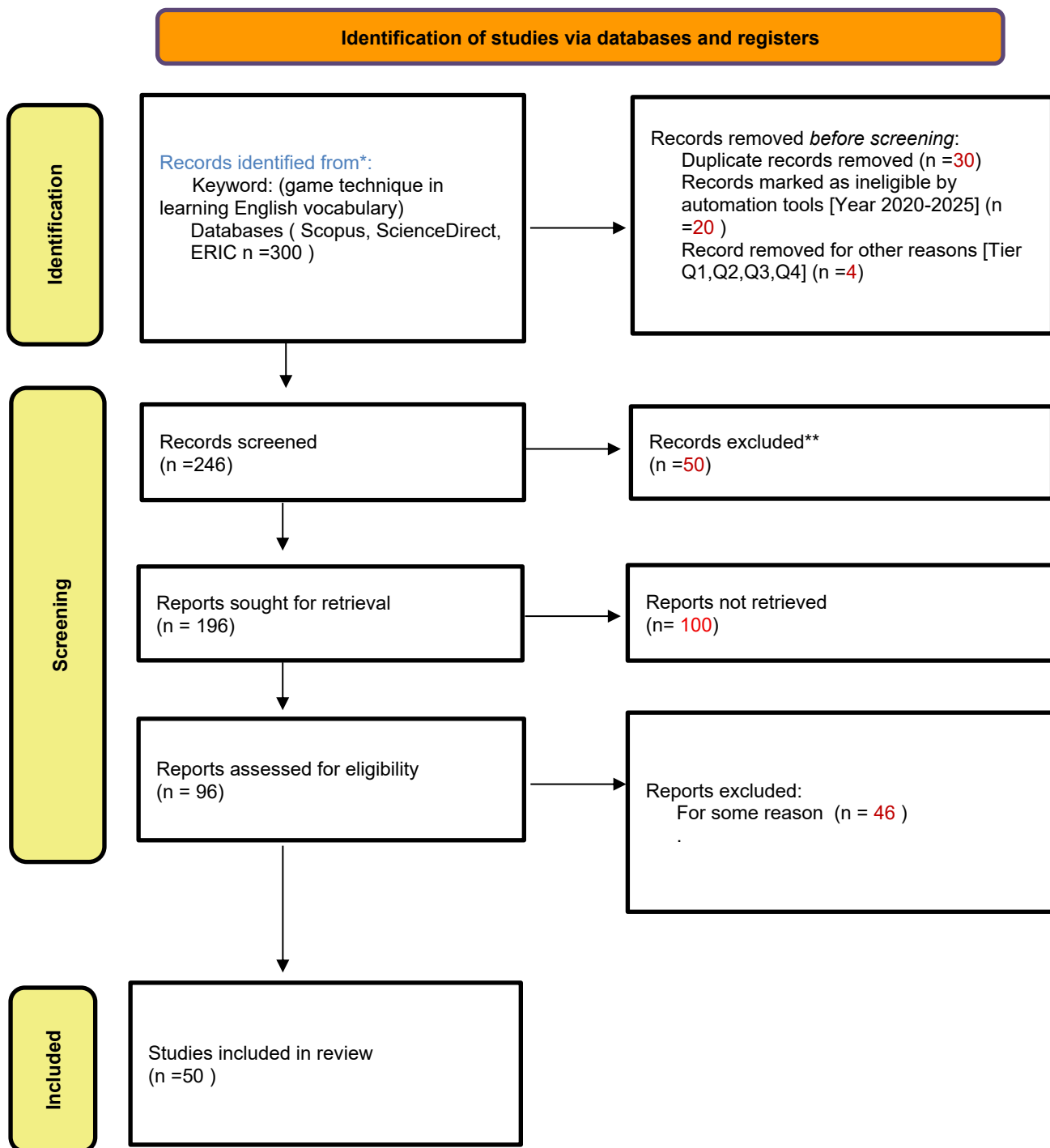


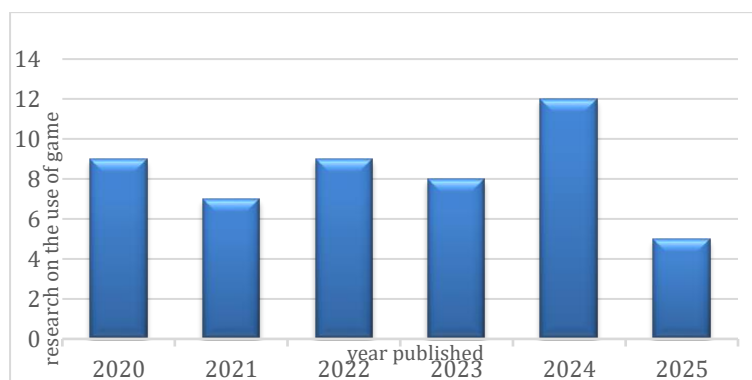
Figure 1. PRISMA 2020| Generate from Watase Uake Tools

## FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the fifty articles analyzed in this research, with the intention of answering the previously formulated investigation questions. The analysis begins by examining publication trends in articles connected to the efficiency of utilizing game techniques in improving vocabulary in English mastery in elementary school students during

the period 2020–2025. This trend provides an initial overview of the development of researchers' attention to this topic over time. Considering the findings of the publication trend examination, there significantly increased the quantity of studies discussing using game techniques in English vocabulary learning in the elementary school level between 2020 and 2025. The following graph shows the distribution of selected articles by year of publication. This increase indicates that this topic is increasingly relevant and a significant issue in the field of English language instruction.

FIGURE 2. Publications Trends from 2020-2025



The publication trend graph shows that the number of studies on the efficiency of game use techniques in English vocabulary learning in elementary schools experienced a fluctuating increase from 2020 to 2025. In 2020, the number of publications was quite high, indicating that this topic had received significant attention. However, starting in 2021, this topic saw a relatively small decline compared to 2020. In 2022, the number of publications was quite high, similar to 2020. Meanwhile, in 2023, there was a notable rise in the quantity of articles compared to 2021, indicating growing interest and attention from researchers in the use of game techniques in language learning contexts. The peak occurred in 2024, with the highest number of articles published. Although the number of publications appears to have decreased in 2025, this may be due to the limited availability of fully indexed articles to date. Overall, this trend indicates that this topic is quite relevant and continues to develop in elementary education studies. The findings of this study confirm that game-based techniques are highly effective in improving English vocabulary mastery in elementary school students. Based on an analysis of 50 studies published between 2020 and 2025, 88% of the studies reported significant increases in vocabulary achievement after implementing this method. The average increase in students' vocabulary test scores reached 20–35% compared to before the intervention, with some studies recording increases of over 40% in the experimental group.

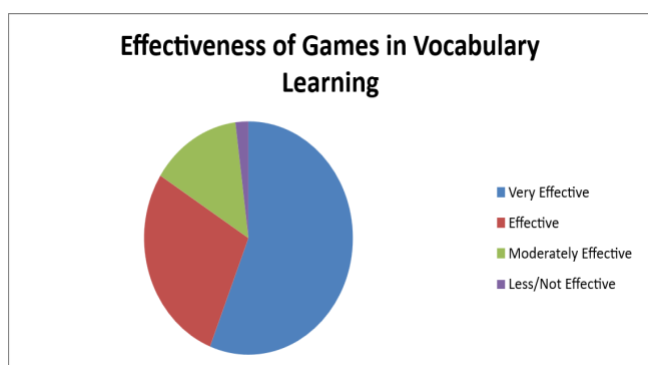
### Effectiveness of Game

The majority of articles concluded that game-based techniques positively contributed to improving students' vocabulary mastery. Effectiveness was demonstrated through improved pre- and post-test scores, increased student participation, and increased vocabulary use in both spoken and written contexts. Overall, the use of games created a fun learning environment and motivated students to actively use English. Details of the effectiveness of game best of review researchers as shown below in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Effectiveness of Game

Effectiveness Level	Number of Articles	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	28	56%
Effective	14	28%
Moderately Effective	7	14%
Less/Not Effective	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

FIGURE 3. Effectiveness of Games in Vocabulary Learning



Based on an analysis of 50 articles reviewed between 2020 and 2025, the majority of studies found the application of games in English vocabulary learning at the elementary school level is highly effective. Fifty-six percent of articles categorized the use of game techniques as very effective, followed by 28% as effective. Meanwhile, 14% of articles classified them as moderately effective, and only 2% considered them less effective or not at all effective. These findings demonstrate that game-based learning methods not only improve vocabulary mastery but also strengthen student engagement in the learning process. Games provide a fun learning experience and encourage active engagement, which enhances the learning process meaningful and positively impacting student learning outcomes.

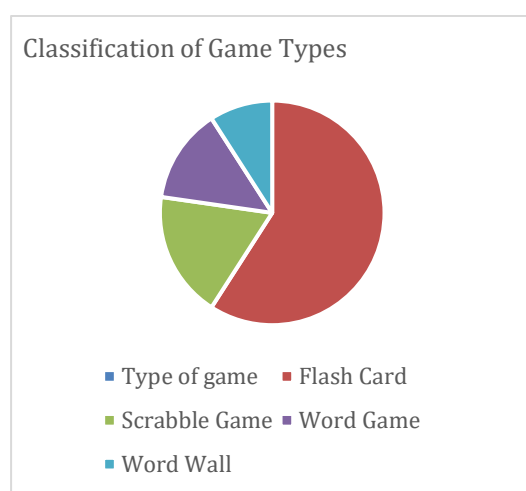
### Classification of Game Types

Based on the classification results of the reviewed articles, the game techniques used were divided into several main categories, such as word game, flash cards, word wall game, and Scrabble. Flash cards and Scrabble were the most dominant types used in these studies, as they are considered to significantly increase student engagement and motivation. Details of the types of game as shown below in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Types of Game

Type of Game	Number of Articles	Percentage (%)
Flash Card	13	54,17 %
Scrabble Game	4	16,67 %
Word Game	3	12,50 %
Word wall	2	8,33 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>

FIGURE 4. Classification of Game Types



Based on data classifying the types of games used in English vocabulary learning in elementary schools, flashcards are the most frequently used technique, appearing in 13 articles, or approximately 59.1% of the total. Scrabble games then appeared in four articles (18.2%), followed by word games in three articles (13.6%), and word walls in two articles (9.1%). These findings indicate that flashcards were the most dominant game method in research on this topic during the 2020–2025 period. This is likely due to the ease of implementation and flexibility of using flashcards in the context of vocabulary learning for elementary school students.

### Success Factors in Implementing Game Techniques in Learning English Vocabulary

In light of the findings of the synthesis of 50 articles analyzed (2020–2025), it was discovered that the success of implementing game techniques in teaching English vocabulary at the elementary school level is influenced by various factors. These factors appear consistently in several studies, both in online and face-to-face learning contexts. Identifying these factors is important to provide a comprehensive picture for teachers and learning designers so that the implementation of game techniques can be more effective and appropriate to students' needs. The success of implementing game techniques in learning English vocabulary is not only determined by the type of game used, but also by various interrelated supporting and inhibiting factors. These elements may be categorized three primary aspects: (1) factors related to students, (2) factors related to teachers, and (3) factors related to the learning environment.

Details of the student engagement and motivation in learning English vocabulary as shown below in table 4.

TABLE 4. Student Engagement and Motivation in Learning English Vocabulary

Factor category	Subfactors	Description of Research Findings	Reference
<b>Student factors</b>	Motivation to learn	Students with high intrinsic motivation show more active participation during games	Tuti and Ilinawati (2020); Melanie Anak Jerry and Melor Md Yunus (2021); Aris Ariyanto et al. (2025); Brigitta Septarini R. (2021); Nyoman Karina Wedhanti et al. (2021); Aisyah Siti Khasanah and Gina Sonia, (2020); & Yuliana and Rivi Antoni, (2024).
	Early vocabulary skills	Students with better initial vocabulary mastery were able to understand game instructions more quickly	I Nyoman Weda D. (2022); Ni Putu Ayu Niya Loviani et al. (2022); Namda Armelia et al. (2024); Aulia Rahmah and Yuli Astutik (2020); Imam Muhyiddin (2020); Tira Nur Fitria, (2023); Cheok Chuan Sin and Mohamed M Ali Abdulkhaleq (2024); Erlince Alyona et al.(2022); Farrah Afa Khasani et al. (2023); Yennie Widyarningsih et al. (2023); Sri Ningsih et al. (2022); & M Sofian Hadi et al. (2021).
		Students with a kinesthetic learning style are more responsive to movement based games	Nur Zarimah and Kalsum, (2024); Evi Karmila et al. (2020); Arsyi Rizqia Amalia, (2020); Amr Mahmoud Abdeldaim Mohamed, (2020); & Nilufar Zafar Qizi Omonova and Ziola Tursunboy Qizi Rozikova, (2025).
Participation and collaboration	Active involvement in groups improves understanding of new vocabulary	Ellok Mustika Wulandari, (2025); Meli Safira, e al. (2021); Zahratul Fikni, et al. (2024); Eva Faliyanti and Arif Irfan Tanjung, (2020); Muhammad Taufik Hidayat and Arlien Karlina Yulianti, (2020); Septiana Yudha Putri, et al. (2024); & Nuril Badiatus Sa'adah, et al. (2024).	

<b>Teacher factors</b>	Game management skills	Teachers who are able to provide clear instructions and manage time effectively can maximize the benefits of play	Ragil Quanita Putri and Dewi Syafitri, (2022); Numaningsih, (2021); Bahagia Tarigan and Lia Pelita Hati, (2021); & Ketut Sumbertada, (2024).
	Game design creativity	Teachers who modify games according to the learning context result in higher student engagement	Maisarah Binti Che Mat, et al. (2023); Clara Die Mee Yieng and Azlina Abdul Aziz, (2022); & Kadek Krisna A. Suhendra, (2023).
	Ability to provide feedback	Quick and precise feedback during the game helps strengthen vocabulary retention	Indri Setyaningsih et al. (2024); Maya Safitri et al. (2025); & Brenda Ak Lukas, et al. (2020).
<b>Learning environment factors</b>	Facilities and media	The availability of props, word cards, or digital devices supports the smooth running of the game	Ounu Zakiy Sukatan, et al. (2023); Inayatul Fuad et al. (2023); & Mila Aswita and Meristika Moetia, (2025).
	Classroom atmosphere	A fun and pressure-free learning environment increases student's openness to trying new vocabulary.	Chayakom Jeenpracha, et al. (2023); Bulan Catur Permatasari et al. (2024); & Tiarna Marpaung, et al. (2024).
	Curriculum support	Integration of game techniques into lesson plans and curriculum helps sustain implementation	Na'imah, (2022); & Diana Fauzia Sari, et al. (2022).

Table 4 shows that the success of using game techniques in vocabulary learning is influenced by a combination of factors: the teacher's role, game design, facilities, student motivation, and the participation and duration. Teachers who are able to manage games appropriately, supported by relevant games and adequate facilities, can increase student engagement and vocabulary retention. These factors are interrelated and need to be managed in an integrated manner for game-based learning to achieve optimal results. Therefore, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of game techniques does not depend solely on one aspect, but rather on the interaction of various mutually supporting factors. This demonstrates the need for a holistic approach in their implementation, where the teacher, media, strategies, and student conditions all play a role in ensuring successful vocabulary learning.

Based on an analysis of articles reviewed between 2020 and 2025, it was found that the application of game techniques in English vocabulary learning for elementary school students generally demonstrates high effectiveness. Various types of games, such as flashcards, Scrabble games, word games, and word walls, have been used in various studies, with results tending to be positive for improving students' vocabulary mastery. Most studies indicate that games can create a fun, interactive learning environment and motivate students to be more engaged in the process of learning. Games have also been shown to improve retention of new vocabulary because students are directly involved in contextual and enjoyable activities. For

example, the use of flashcards is the most dominant method because it is practical, easily adapted, and effective for introducing and reviewing basic vocabulary. Meanwhile, games like Scrabble and word games are considered to stimulate students' critical thinking skills, collaboration, and reading skills.

In terms of effectiveness, most articles indicate that the application of games in vocabulary education is classified as very efficient (around 56%) and effective (around 28%). Only a small percentage considered the implementation of games to be either moderately or ineffective, and this was generally attributed to external factors such as limited implementation time, lack of teacher preparation, or the inappropriateness of the game type to the students' characteristics. Furthermore, the findings also indicate that the successful use of game techniques depends on several important factors, including: the selection of appropriate game types that align with learning objectives; The teacher's active role in facilitating and directing the games; Classroom conditions and the readiness of infrastructure; Student participation levels and motivation for active learning. Thus, this synthesis of findings confirms that game techniques are a potential and feasible pedagogical approach for implementation teaching vocabulary in English in elementary school level. In addition to enhancing learning outcomes, games also support students' social and emotional development in relation to acquiring a foreign language.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study indicate that game techniques have proven efficient in enhancing vocabulary in English mastery in elementary school students. Of the 50 articles analyzed, 56% reported that the application of game techniques was categorized as very effective, while 28% categorized as effective. This reinforces the view that games are not merely recreational activities but also function as pedagogical tools capable of creating a fun learning atmosphere, increasing student engagement, and strengthening vocabulary retention. This finding is consistent with previous research. Ilinawati and Tuti (2022) found that the game of Scrabble techniques improved students' mastery of vocabulary. Another study by Ellok (2025) found that incorporating flashcards into English learning can be an efficient method for expanding one's vocabulary retention and student acquiring knowledge outcomes. Yuliana and Rivi (2024) also found that word games are a successful method for enhancing language proficiency and creating enjoyable learning activities. Meanwhile, an investigation by Maya and others. (2025) discovered that Word wall games improved students' vocabulary mastery. This was demonstrated by improvements in students' pre- and post-test results.

Furthermore, this study found that the effectiveness of games is not solely determined by the type of game used but is also influenced by several other factors. Teacher skills in managing games, the level of student participation, and the support of facilities and infrastructure are essential in establishing the success of the implementing game-based techniques. As found by Bulan et al. (2024), these games not just improve students' command of vocabulary, but also increase their drive to acquire English. Consequently, it is advised that educators use a variety of instructional strategies to increase students' passion for learning, motivating them to be active and passionate learners in the classroom. This contrasts with the findings of Clara and Azlina (2022), who found that Game-based learning is a successful tactic for improving students' spelling and vocabulary since it increases students' drive, expertise, and abilities. This difference indicates that the effectiveness of game-based techniques is highly dependent on the implementation context, including teacher readiness, student characteristics, and the availability of supporting facilities.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce constructivism hypothesis, which emphasizes that information is built via active experience, cooperation as well as social engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). By using games, students can naturally construct new vocabulary within meaningful contexts. Practically, this study implies that teachers need to consider integrating games as a primary teaching method to improve vocabulary learning outcomes while maintaining student motivation and enthusiasm. However, this study also has limitations. First, the timeframe used in the analysis only covers 2020–2025, so long-term trends are not fully captured. Second, most of the articles analyzed are from Asian contexts, so generalization to other regions or cultures is still limited. Third, variations in effectiveness measurement instruments in the articles analyzed may influence differences in research results. Based on these findings, future research can be directed at exploring in-depth the differences in effectiveness between digital and non-digital games, the implementation of games at various levels of education, and the relationship between games and students' affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and learning interest. Thus, further research can offer a more thorough picture of the role of game techniques in improving English vocabulary mastery.

The results of this investigation show that using game techniques within English terms learning in the elementary school level has a significant impact on improving student mastery. Most of the studies analyzed indicate that games not only strengthen students' memory and understanding of vocabulary but also enhance their desire to study and their involvement in the educational procedure. The practical implication of these findings is that elementary school English teachers are advised to more actively integrate various types of educational games into the learning process. Games such as flashcards, Scrabble games, word walls, and word games have been shown to provide fun and effective learning stimuli, particularly in fostering a participatory classroom atmosphere. Theoretically, these findings also reinforce constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning experiences through direct interaction and involvement. The use of games can be positioned as a medium that facilitates active and contextual learning. Furthermore, policy implications that should be considered include the need for teacher training in designing and implementing educational games that align with English language learning objectives. School-level curricula can consider flexibility in teaching methods to effectively accommodate innovative approaches such as game techniques.

## **CONCLUSION**

The content analysis results of 50 published articles between 2020 and 2025 show that using game techniques within English terms learning in the elementary school level has a significant impact on improving student mastery. Games have been shown to produce an enjoyable learning atmosphere, encourage active student engagement, and improve retention and comprehension of the vocabulary learned. The majority of articles (over 75%) indicate that game techniques are very effective or effective in the context of vocabulary learning. This research confirms that game techniques are not merely entertainment tools but also pedagogical strategies with a strong theoretical basis for supporting meaningful language learning. The practical implication of these findings is that elementary school English teachers are advised to more actively integrate various types of educational games into the learning process. Games such as flashcards, scrabble games, word walls, and word games have been shown to provide fun and effective learning stimuli, particularly in fostering a participatory classroom atmosphere. Theoretically, these findings also reinforce constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful learning experiences through direct interaction and

involvement. The use of games can be positioned as a medium that facilitates active and contextual learning. Furthermore, policy implications that should be considered include the need for teacher training in designing and implementing educational games that align with English language learning objectives. School-level curricula can consider flexibility in teaching methods to effectively accommodate innovative approaches such as game techniques. Therefore, the integration of game techniques in English learning in elementary schools is highly recommended by both teachers and educational policymakers.

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