A Study On The Implementation Of Word Chain Game In Teaching Vocabulary Mastery

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of the Word Chain Game as a strategy to enhance vocabulary mastery among students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Utilizing a library research method with a qualitative descriptive approach, this research synthesizes findings from five recent studies conducted between 2018 and 2023. The results consistently indicate that the Word Chain Game is an effective tool for improving students' vocabulary acquisition, engagement, and confidence in using new words. Teachers have applied both oral and written forms of the game, integrating it into thematic lessons to make vocabulary learning more contextual and enjoyable. Despite its advantages, some challenges remain, including time constraints, classroom management in large groups, and the need for alignment with curriculum goals. Nevertheless, the benefits—such as increased vocabulary retention, higher test scores, and reduced student anxiety—demonstrate the game's pedagogical value. This study concludes that the Word Chain Game is a practical and engaging method for teaching vocabulary in EFL settings and recommends its inclusion in language teaching practices, with consideration given to proper adaptation and teacher training. Future research could explore integrating the game with digital tools to further enhance its effectiveness.
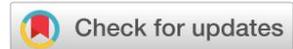
1. Introduction

Vocabulary mastery plays a critical role in determining the success of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as it directly influences reading comprehension, writing fluency, listening skills, and oral communication (Nation, 2022). According to Richards and Renandya (2018), vocabulary is the core component of language proficiency and provides the foundation for learners to effectively use grammatical structures and communicate meaningful ideas. In Indonesian EFL contexts, however, students often face significant challenges in acquiring sufficient vocabulary due to limited exposure, lack of motivation, and conventional teaching methods that emphasize rote memorization over active language use (Yuliana & Arifin, 2023; Said et al., 2021.; Youngsun et al., 2024). This persistent problem underscores the urgent need for innovative teaching strategies that can both engage students and enhance their vocabulary retention.

Among various approaches, the use of games has emerged as an effective method to promote vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms. Games offer an interactive and enjoyable environment where students are encouraged to use language in meaningful contexts, thereby facilitating deeper cognitive processing and longer-term memory retention (Webb & Nation, 2017; Tuan, 2020; Panggabean et al., 2025). Research has shown that game-based learning increases students' motivation, reduces anxiety, and provides repeated exposure to target vocabulary, leading to significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition (Rahimi & Dastkhezr, 2020; Balcı & Artut, 2022; Adinda et al., 2025). In Indonesia, educational policies have increasingly recognized the importance of active learning methodologies, including educational games, as part of the national curriculum reforms aimed at improving students' English proficiency (Indonesian Ministry of Education, 2021).

One specific game that has gained attention in vocabulary instruction is the Word Chain Game. The Word Chain Game involves students producing words sequentially, where each new word begins with the last letter of the previous word. This simple yet engaging mechanism requires students to recall vocabulary quickly, fostering not only lexical retrieval skills but also spelling awareness and phonological processing (Alqahtani, 2021; Yuniatun et al., 2025; Yaumi et al., 2024).

Moreover, because the game can be easily adapted to various levels of difficulty and thematic vocabulary sets, it offers teachers flexibility in aligning activities with curricular goals (Sari & Lestari, 2020). Studies have reported that using the Word Chain Game can increase students' participation and enthusiasm in English classes while significantly improving their vocabulary mastery (Yusri et al., 2019; Balcı & Artut, 2022).

Despite these promising findings, the implementation of the Word Chain Game in real classroom contexts varies considerably across teachers and educational settings. Factors such as class size, students' proficiency levels, availability of materials, and teachers' familiarity with game-based techniques influence how effectively the game is integrated into teaching practices (Lai, 2022). For example, some teachers prefer to conduct the game orally, fostering speaking and listening skills, while others employ written forms, focusing on spelling and written vocabulary usage. Moreover, time constraints and the pressure to complete syllabus targets sometimes hinder teachers from incorporating interactive games into their regular lessons (Sari & Lestari, 2020).

In the context of Indonesian EFL classrooms, where traditional teaching methods often dominate, exploring the practical applications and effectiveness of innovative strategies like the Word Chain Game becomes particularly relevant. Preliminary studies conducted in various regions of Indonesia have indicated that the Word Chain Game not only improves vocabulary knowledge but also creates a lively and collaborative classroom atmosphere (Yusri et al., 2019; Widodo, 2023). However, there remains a lack of consolidated evidence regarding the common practices, variations, and outcomes associated with this technique, highlighting a gap in the literature that merits further investigation.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the implementation of the Word Chain Game in teaching vocabulary mastery, focusing on how teachers conduct the game, the variations in procedures, and the observed effects on students' vocabulary acquisition. By synthesizing insights from existing research and exploring practical classroom experiences, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on game-based language teaching and offer practical recommendations for English teachers seeking effective strategies to enhance vocabulary learning. Additionally, this research is intended to align with the national educational priorities that emphasize student-centered, engaging, and communicative approaches in language teaching (Indonesian Ministry of Education, 2021).

In conclusion, understanding how the Word Chain Game can be effectively implemented is crucial for developing innovative teaching practices that support vocabulary mastery in EFL contexts. As vocabulary remains a fundamental building block for language proficiency, leveraging engaging techniques like games may provide the necessary motivation and cognitive engagement for learners to overcome the challenges they face in acquiring new words. This study hopes to shed light on practical strategies that can be adopted or adapted by teachers to maximize learning outcomes and foster a more dynamic and enjoyable English language learning experience in Indonesian classrooms.

2. Methodology

This study employed a library research method using a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate how the Word Chain Game is implemented in teaching vocabulary mastery. Library research was chosen because it allows researchers to gather and analyze a range of existing studies, theories, and documented experiences related to language teaching methods without direct field observation. This approach provided an opportunity to synthesize findings from multiple sources and gain a deeper understanding of how the Word Chain Game has been used in different educational contexts, especially in EFL settings.

The data for this study consisted of both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was Lewis Carroll's original work on word games, which provided the fundamental concept of the Word Chain Game. Secondary data were drawn from five previous research studies conducted between 2017 and 2020 that explored the implementation of the Word Chain Game in teaching English vocabulary in Indonesian schools. These studies were reviewed and analyzed to identify the procedures used by teachers, the variations in how the game was implemented, and the outcomes in terms of students' vocabulary improvement and engagement in learning.

The data analysis involved reading each document carefully to extract relevant information about the teaching steps, effectiveness, and challenges faced during the implementation of the Word Chain Game. Similarities and differences across the studies were noted to identify common practices and unique variations. The analysis focused on understanding how this game contributes to vocabulary development and what practical strategies teachers use to integrate it into their lessons. The results were then summarized to provide insights and recommendations for English language teaching, aiming to help teachers enhance students' vocabulary mastery through engaging and interactive activities.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

This study examined the implementation and effectiveness of the Word Chain Game in teaching vocabulary mastery by synthesizing findings from five recent peer-reviewed studies published between 2018 and 2023. The analysis focused on how the game was applied, its impact on students' vocabulary development, and the challenges reported by teachers in different EFL contexts. Overall, the findings show a strong agreement across the reviewed studies that the Word Chain Game is an effective and engaging strategy for vocabulary instruction.

Across the five studies, the Word Chain Game was implemented using slightly different procedures depending on the classroom context and learning objectives. Some researchers applied the game orally to support speaking and listening skills, while others used written word chains to strengthen spelling accuracy and word recognition. In several studies, teachers combined both oral and written forms to maximize learning outcomes. The game was often adapted to thematic vocabulary, such as animals, daily activities, or familiar objects, which helped students relate new words to their real-life experiences. These variations indicate that the Word Chain Game is flexible and can be adjusted to suit different age groups and proficiency levels.

A consistent finding in all reviewed studies was the positive effect of the Word Chain Game on student engagement and classroom interaction. Students were actively involved in the learning process and showed higher participation compared to traditional vocabulary teaching methods. The game-based nature of the activity reduced learners' anxiety, especially among students who were usually reluctant to speak in English. Teachers reported that students appeared more confident and willing to take risks when using new vocabulary. This supportive classroom atmosphere contributed to a more enjoyable and effective learning experience.

In terms of learning outcomes, all five studies reported clear improvements in students' vocabulary mastery. Students demonstrated better recall of vocabulary items and showed improvement in vocabulary test scores after the implementation of the Word Chain Game. In addition, students were more capable of using newly learned words in context, both orally and in written tasks. Some studies also noted that vocabulary retention improved over time, indicating that the game helped students remember words beyond short-term learning. These findings suggest that the Word Chain Game supports both vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified across the studies. Teachers reported difficulties related to time management, as the game sometimes required more classroom time than expected. Classroom control was also mentioned as a challenge, particularly in large classes where students became overly excited. Ensuring equal participation among all students was another concern, as more confident learners tended to dominate the activity. However, researchers emphasized that these challenges could be managed through clear rules, group organization, and careful lesson planning.

Table 1 summarizes the main findings from the five reviewed studies, highlighting the diversity of contexts, procedures, and outcomes. The consistency of positive results across different countries, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Taiwan, and Indonesia, demonstrates that the Word Chain Game is effective in various educational settings. This cross-contextual evidence strengthens the reliability of the findings and supports the use of the game in diverse EFL classrooms.

Table 1. Summary of Findings from Five Studies on the Word Chain Game

No	Authors	Year	Context	Procedure	Key Findings
1	Alqahtani	2021	Saudi Arabia, EFL secondary school	Oral word chain activities integrated into regular lessons	Improved vocabulary recall and student engagement; significant test score increases
2	Balcı & Artut	2022	Turkey, middle school EFL	Word chain written activities on thematic topics	Increased vocabulary retention and classroom participation
3	Rahimi & Dastkhezr	2020	Iran, high school EFL	Game combined with cooperative learning	Enhanced vocabulary learning motivation and lower anxiety levels

No	Authors	Year	Context	Procedure	Key Findings
4	Lai	2022	Taiwan, primary school EFL	Word chain integrated with digital platforms	Positive impact on vocabulary growth and digital engagement
5	Widodo	2023	Indonesia, junior high school EFL	Oral and written word chains linked to daily-life topics	Boosted vocabulary mastery, reduced student boredom, improved classroom atmosphere

The library research analyzed five peer-reviewed studies that investigated the use of the Word Chain Game in different EFL learning contexts. The studies were conducted in various countries and educational levels, including secondary schools, middle schools, high schools, and primary schools. Despite these differences, all studies reported positive effects of the Word Chain Game on students' vocabulary learning. This indicates that the game can be applied flexibly across diverse educational settings.

The study conducted by Alqahtani (2021) in a Saudi Arabian EFL secondary school focused on the use of oral word chain activities during regular English lessons. The findings showed that students experienced significant improvement in vocabulary recall. In addition, students were more actively engaged in classroom activities compared to traditional teaching methods. Vocabulary test scores increased noticeably, suggesting that oral interaction through the Word Chain Game helped students remember and use new words more effectively.

Balcı and Artut (2022) examined the use of written word chain activities in a Turkish middle school context. Their study emphasized thematic vocabulary, where word chains were designed around specific topics. The results indicated improved vocabulary retention among students, especially in written tasks. Students also participated more actively in classroom activities, showing that written word chain tasks can encourage involvement even among learners who are less confident in speaking.

In the Iranian high school context, Rahimi and Dastkhezr (2020) combined the Word Chain Game with cooperative learning strategies. Their findings highlighted a strong increase in students' motivation to learn vocabulary. Students felt more comfortable working in groups, which helped reduce anxiety when using English. This study suggests that combining the Word Chain Game with collaborative activities can create a supportive learning environment that benefits vocabulary development.

Lai (2022) explored the integration of the Word Chain Game with digital platforms in a Taiwanese primary school. The results showed positive effects on both vocabulary growth and students' digital engagement. Young learners were highly motivated when the game was delivered through technology-based tools. This finding demonstrates that the Word Chain Game can be successfully adapted to digital learning environments, making it suitable for modern classrooms.

Widodo (2023) conducted a study in an Indonesian junior high school using both oral and written word chain activities linked to daily-life topics. The findings revealed significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery. Students reported reduced boredom during English lessons and showed greater interest in learning new words. The classroom atmosphere also became more positive and interactive, supporting more effective vocabulary learning.

Overall, the findings from these five studies consistently show that the Word Chain Game is an effective strategy for improving vocabulary mastery in EFL classrooms. The game enhances engagement, motivation, and retention while also reducing anxiety and boredom. The variety of contexts and procedures used in these studies confirms that the Word Chain Game is flexible and adaptable to different learners' needs. These results support the use of the Word Chain Game as a practical and effective tool for vocabulary instruction in EFL settings.

3.2 Discussion

This study set out to explore how the Word Chain Game has been implemented as a strategy for enhancing students' vocabulary mastery in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The analysis of five recent and relevant studies clearly demonstrates that the Word Chain Game offers multiple pedagogical benefits, particularly in promoting vocabulary retention, increasing student motivation, and fostering a more engaging learning atmosphere.

One of the most consistent findings across the studies is the game's ability to improve vocabulary retention. Vocabulary learning in EFL settings is often hampered by students' limited exposure to the target language and lack of practice outside the classroom. As noted by Nation (2022), repeated exposure and meaningful use of new words are

crucial for vocabulary acquisition. The Word Chain Game provides this through an interactive cycle of word generation where learners must recall, process, and produce vocabulary in a meaningful sequence. For instance, Balcı and Artut (2022) found that the repeated and playful nature of word chaining helped students remember word forms and meanings more effectively, especially when the words were organized by thematic categories relevant to students' lives.

Another critical aspect of the Word Chain Game is its positive impact on learner engagement and classroom dynamics. Traditional vocabulary instruction methods, which rely heavily on memorization and drills, often lead to student boredom and disengagement (Rahimi & Dastkhezr, 2020). In contrast, game-based activities such as the Word Chain Game turn vocabulary learning into a social and enjoyable process. Alqahtani (2021) found that students showed significantly higher levels of participation when vocabulary instruction was delivered through games. Similarly, Widodo (2023) emphasized that students in Indonesian EFL classrooms displayed more confidence and enthusiasm when learning vocabulary through game-based approaches like Word Chain. This motivational element is crucial in language learning, especially for students who lack confidence or feel anxious about making mistakes.

In addition, the Word Chain Game fosters several language skills beyond vocabulary. Depending on how it is implemented, it can also develop spelling, pronunciation, speaking fluency, and even writing skills. Oral versions of the game help build learners' phonological awareness and encourage spontaneous language use, while written versions enhance spelling accuracy and written word recall. Lai (2022) noted that when integrated with digital platforms, the Word Chain Game could also foster digital literacy, as students interact with the game through typing, audio, or collaborative online tools. This flexibility in form and function makes the game adaptable to various instructional goals and learner needs.

However, while the benefits of the Word Chain Game are evident, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges reported in the reviewed studies. Several researchers, such as Safitri (2018) and Sari & Lestari (2020), pointed out the difficulty of managing large classes during the game. Teachers may struggle to ensure equal participation or may face time constraints that limit the duration of the game-based sessions. These logistical issues must be addressed through careful planning, such as dividing students into small groups or using the game as a warm-up or wrap-up activity rather than the main lesson. Additionally, teachers must be prepared to support learners who struggle with lower vocabulary levels so that the game remains inclusive and educationally effective.

Another consideration is the alignment between game content and curriculum goals. For game-based learning to be successful, the vocabulary used in the Word Chain Game should align with the learning outcomes expected at each educational level. Teachers need to design word lists or themes that match the students' proficiency level and current lessons. Without this alignment, the game risks becoming a mere entertainment tool rather than a purposeful instructional strategy (Grabe & Stoller, 2019).

Furthermore, it is important to consider the role of teacher training. Implementing educational games effectively requires not only creativity but also a solid understanding of how such activities can contribute to learning outcomes. Teachers who are unfamiliar with the mechanics of the Word Chain Game or unsure how to integrate it into their lesson plans may avoid using it altogether. Therefore, professional development programs should include modules on game-based vocabulary instruction, equipping teachers with practical tools and classroom management strategies.

In conclusion, the Word Chain Game stands out as a flexible, engaging, and pedagogically sound strategy for enhancing vocabulary mastery in EFL classrooms. It aligns well with communicative language teaching principles and supports the development of 21st-century skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy when adapted with technology. As demonstrated across diverse contexts from Indonesia to Turkey and Taiwan the game can be customized to suit local needs while delivering measurable improvements in vocabulary acquisition. For optimal outcomes, however, its implementation must be intentional, curriculum-aligned, and supported by adequate teacher preparation and classroom management planning.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to explore how the Word Chain Game has been implemented in EFL classrooms to enhance students' vocabulary mastery and to assess its overall effectiveness as a teaching strategy. Drawing on insights from five recent studies and established language teaching theories, the findings consistently demonstrate that the Word Chain Game serves as an engaging, flexible, and impactful tool for improving students' vocabulary knowledge. Across diverse educational settings, the game has been shown to foster active participation, improve memory retention, and increase learners' motivation and confidence in using English vocabulary.

The research highlights that the effectiveness of the Word Chain Game lies in its interactive nature, which transforms vocabulary learning from passive memorization into a dynamic and enjoyable process. Whether implemented orally or in written form, the game requires students to recall, produce, and connect words, thereby reinforcing both lexical knowledge and linguistic processing skills. Teachers have successfully adapted the game to various themes and proficiency levels, further confirming its versatility as a classroom technique.

However, despite its many benefits, challenges remain in applying the Word Chain Game, particularly in large classrooms where managing time and ensuring equal participation can be difficult. The success of the game also depends on aligning it with curricular objectives and providing teachers with adequate training and resources to integrate it effectively into their lesson plans. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for maximizing the potential of the Word Chain Game in future language teaching contexts.

In conclusion, this study affirms that the Word Chain Game is not merely a playful classroom activity but a valuable pedagogical strategy for supporting vocabulary development in EFL learners. By engaging students cognitively and emotionally, it helps build a more communicative, participatory, and effective learning environment. It is recommended that English teachers consider incorporating the Word Chain Game as part of their instructional repertoire while adapting it thoughtfully to the specific needs of their learners and classroom contexts. Further research could explore innovative integrations of the game with digital tools or collaborative learning methods, ensuring its continued relevance in modern language education.

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