# Implementation of Using Word Game to Improve Students' Vocabulary Mastery

# during Online Learning in Thailand

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## Abstract

The current study strives to enhance seventh graders' comprehension of English vocabulary using word games during online learning at Ban Nonsawan School in Loei, Thailand. This study was based on early findings suggesting students have difficulty learning English due to a lack of vocabulary. Participants in this research ranged in age from 12 to 13 years old and were part of a class of 18 students. This study employs a Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology. The data was gathered by observation, questionnaires, and a test. Triangulation was used to evaluate the data. This study indicates that the seventh-grade students' junior high school English vocabulary at Ban Nonsawan School, before the classroom action research implemented the word games, averaged 62% in cycle 1. After implementing word games, the score increased in cycle 2, an average of 79%. The results of this study met the achievement indicator of 75%. They show that online learning executing word games can motivate students, remember vocabulary quickly, and make learning fun. Based on the classroom action research findings, it can be concluded that word games can help students in seventh grade at Ban Nonsawan School in Loei, Thailand, enhance their English vocabulary proficiency.

**Keywords**: Vocabulary Mastery; Word games; Teaching English; Junior high school.

**Introduction**

At the end of 2019 WHO announced a new virus in the city of Wuhan, China called Covid19. The virus spread quickly throughout China and throughout the world, including Thailand, which has confirmed the entry of Covid-19 into the country. Because of the rapidity of infection, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020. The fact that Covid-19 is classified as a worldwide pandemic or epidemic suggests that the virus is spreading like wildfire. The Thai government has made many attempts to slow the spread of Covid-19, including introducing Work From Home (WFH), Social Distancing, and Physical Distancing (Maheasy et al., 2021). These actions force students to study online. As a result, the students tend to get bored during their studies, including when attending English classes. In fact, English is one of the mandatory courses for Thai junior high school students. Eventually, students are required to master all concepts in English, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students must absorb millions of words to master a language; thus, vocabulary plays a crucial part in all English skills in ESL and EFL classroom activities (Nation, 2013). It suggests that students should have extensive lingo to help them flawlessly grasp all concepts in English.

A variety of approaches and tactics may be employed to make the English teaching and learning process more engaging and compelling. One of them is making use of a game. Games are a condensed operational model of real-life scenarios that allow students to take on numerous roles and engage in various activities (Gerlach and Ely, 1980: 380381). Hadfield (1995: 5) defines games as an activity including rules, goals, and fun. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2014) also noted the game's importance in inspiring younger learners to acquire new English vocabulary. Furthermore, Derakhshan and Khatir (2015) claimed that utilizing a game to acquire a new language is more effective than using common tactics. According to Thornbury (2002), a lack of vocabulary hinders language understanding and output production. Teachers are expected to establish diverse teaching strategies and require teaching techniques to boost students' interest and motivation in learning a language. The use of games in language instruction is one of the most effective ways to achieve these goals (Ersöz, 2000; Kim, 1995). As a result, the learning process will be more effective and productive. This study seeks to assess the efficiency of using word games to improve vocabulary mastery of secondary school students during online learning based on the prior studies mentioned before.

According to the researcher's observations and experience teaching the selected class, students had difficulty learning English vocabulary. Here are some of the challenges that students in Grade 7 faced while studying English. For starters, many students cannot decipher the meaning of specific phrases. Additionally, a large number of students are deficient in vocabulary. Following that, many students believe that acquiring new words is tedious when taught traditionally. Teachers who employ the conventional approach come to class and ask students to read a

particular text, translate it, or discover unknown terms.

Without a doubt, these issues must be resolved. If this trend continues, students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition in English will suffer. Simply put, the goal of learning English cannot be achieved. According to Bonet (1992), puzzles and games can inspire students to understand new words by including a range of uncommon words. Students will feel better due to the variety of instructional strategies utilized in the teaching and learning process. It also assists teachers in creating an environment that is suitable for teaching and learning. It is hoped that the current research would result in a practical teaching approach for improving students' English vocabulary.

**Method**

The researcher used an approach known as Classroom Action Research (CAR) to conduct this investigation. The researcher then applied the Kemmis and Taggart cycle (1990). The cycle process has four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The following figure depicts these stages.
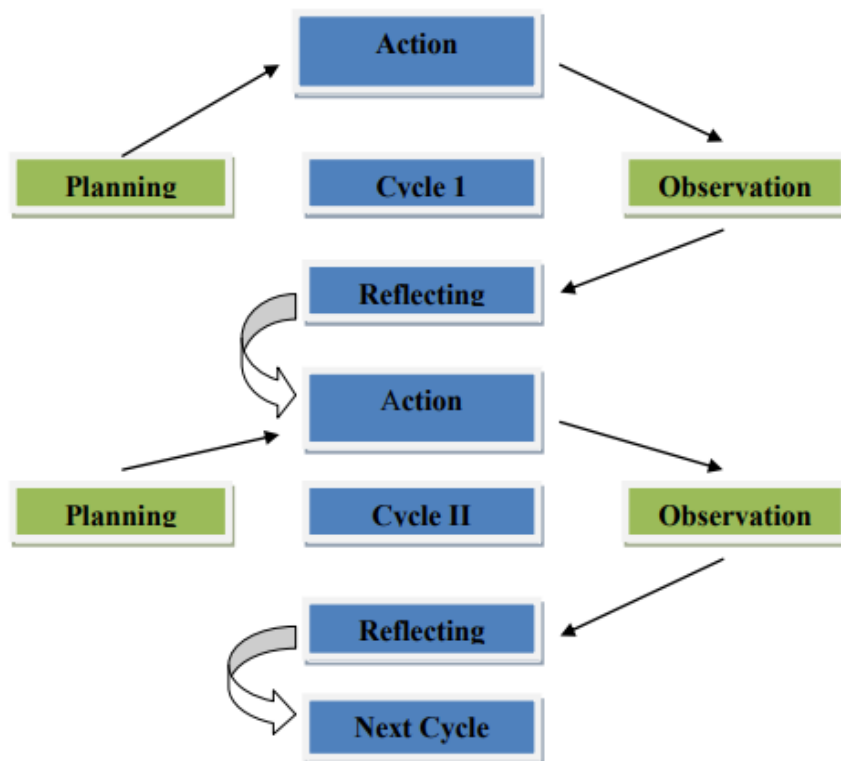


*Figure 1 : The Action Research Spiral of Kemmis and Mc Taggart cited*

CAR is unlike the traditional approach. It is concerned with the steps that lead to creating a finished product. Teachers can assess their teaching-learning process's merits and drawbacks after doing research. Second, this technique is in the form of cycles. In other words, it is ongoing. Planning, acting, observing, and reflecting are the four stages of CAR. The researcher designed all of the materials needed to conduct the study, starting from the essential investigation through the conclusion. The researcher used a combination of technical and traditional strategies. For instance, the researcher used Quizziz and Wordwall to create a word game. When the researcher supplied the treatment to the students, the researcher also observed them by himself. Then, the researcher reviewed and compared all of the data to arrive at the study's conclusions.

The researcher employed several techniques, including observation, questionnaires, and tests, to gather data for the current study. The researcher began making observations from the beginning of the treatment. The researcher watched the teaching in the classroom when it was in progress. The observation was carried out by the researcher until the final meeting of the treatment. The researcher then administered the test to the students. Lastly, the researcher distributed questionnaires to the participants to obtain feedback on the applied strategy during the observation stage.

Next, the researcher employed the triangulation technique to analyze the data. It means that the researcher assessed and compared the results of the questionnaires, observation, and tests with the study's success criteria. The first requirement was that the student's grades had reached a passing grade. Second, students were enthusiastic about taking English classes. The school's passing grade was 75. It indicates that students' minimum scores had to be 75. When their scores improved, the study was dubbed "enhancing students' vocabulary." On the contrary, if the results did not meet the success requirements, the researcher had to go on to the next study cycle.

**Results**

***Student Vocabulary Mastery***

In this study, the indicator English language skills made as a measuring tool to see whether or not the target of this research was achieved. Cameron (2001: 78) explains that there are four indicators that have an effect great for mastery of language English for students, namely pronounciation, spelling, grammar, and meaning; all of these points must be met to master vocabulary because each point is very important. How words are pronounced is one aspect that has a great influence on language mastery. According to Wehmeler (2003: 157), pronunciation refers to how a person enunciates a language's lexicon. Aside from mastering enunciation, students are also required to understand the letters and syllables that make up words, known as spelling. The process of accurately constructing words from individual letters, or the manner in which words are written, is referred to as spelling (Wehmeler 2003: 293). Grammar should also be pursued since it is vital to

comprehend changes in the linguistic structure of words, and students can learn grammatical structures by studying word changes. Finding meaning for words in a new, foreign language is beneficial to students' brains' functioning process since it requires them to learn and retain new terms.

The researcher created a test based on these metrics to meet these criteria. For example, in "Meaning," the researcher developed a Wordwall quiz consisting of matching vocabulary with the proper picture and comparing the image with the correct phrase. Meanwhile, for "Pronunciation," the researcher had the students say the terminology for each photo one by one and then play a homophone game on the Wordwall, matching equivalent words based on their sounds. In the case of "Spelling," the researcher created a crossword puzzle quiz on the same application. The final one is "Grammar," which refers to the grammar section. On Quizziz, the researcher created several quizzes that consisted of grammatical questions relating to the subject being studied.

There are several topics studied in cycles I and II consisting of six topics, namely: are: a) Fruits, b) Animal, c) Part of Body, d) Public Place, e) Transportation, f) Hobby. The goal of the teaching-learning activities is to help students acquire English vocabulary for each subject. English sessions were offered twice a week, each meeting lasting 60 minutes. The researcher utilized Google Meet to facilitate online learning because the classes were held online. The course used during online learning was to play a word game, which required Quizziz and Wordwall as media, and in which the class completed quizzes and answered questions using the two mentioned platforms. For each topic, this method was used. It lasted roughly six interactions over two cycles, with different strategies for improving students' vocabulary mastery.

Through Quizizz and Wordwall, quizzes and tests were administered in every class activity. They took place after the researcher demonstrated and elaborated the material about the subject. At the end of the cycle, the final test was performed. The following are the findings of the assessment of students' vocabulary mastery

*Table 1: The percentage of students' vocabulary mastery (Cycle I & Cycle II)*

| Indicators | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Meaning | 54% | 77% |
| Spelling | 70% | 90% |
| Grammar | 54% | 75% |
| Pronounce | 71% | 77% |
| Avarage | 52% | 79% |

Based on the table above, there are indicators of vocabulary mastery, namely "Meaning," "Spelling," "Grammar," and "Pronunciation," each variable experiencing an increase after implementing the word game into learning. As in the first variable,

namely "Meaning," in cycle 1, it got 54%, and in cycle 2, it rose 23% to 77%. This occurred because students learned by playing word games on Wordwall by matching pictures or statements so that students became interested and easy to understand the meaning for each vocabulary. It indicates that word games positively impact the students' ability to understand the definition of words.

In the second variable, namely "Spelling," there is an increase of 20% from cycle 1 by 70% and in cycle 2 to 90%. This increase occurred because the teacher implemented the word game well through students' assignments by playing crossword through Wordwall. The use of the crossword puzzle game against compelling vocabulary mastery interest of students helps students in understanding and mastering English vocabulary, especially for spelling which is considered very difficult. This phenomenon showed that word games can also improve students' spelling vocabulary skills.

The third variable is "Grammar." The teacher made a grammar quiz using Quizizz as a medium in this variable. The implementation of word games through Quizizz had also been proven to improve students' grammar skills, shown in table 1, which has increased by 21% from the beginning of cycle 1. It rose to 75% in cycle 2. This phenomenon indicated that word games can also improve students' grammar skills.

The fourth variable is "Pronunciation." As noted in Gushendra (2017 p. 54), pronunciation is how someone enunciates words from a language (Wehmeler, 2003, p. 1057). The exercise for this variable was for the teacher to provide a picture or situation and the students to guess the phrase from the image or problem, then repeat it to achieve the goal. The teacher also made a quiz by playing homophones through the Wordwall to become proficient in pronouncing the vocabulary. This activity was proven to improve students' pronunciation skills, as shown in Table 1, which managed to increase by 6% from cycle 1 of 71%, which increased in cycle 2 to 77%. This activity showed that word games also can improve students' pronunciation skills.

The researcher made a questionnaire and ran observations to find out students' opinions on whether applying word games successfully carried out effective English learning. From the observations, it was found that the teacher still felt awkward in implementing the word game. Besides, students still did not pay attention to the teacher's explanation. It was also noted that they were still not interested in the various games played using the Wordwall and Quizizz because they were not familiar and confused about how to operate the applications. However, over time, the teacher and students began to get used to implementing the word game. The students also seemed enthusiastic and happy while studying. After all of the word game learning had been accomplished, students were handed a questionnaire. Nur Hidayat's (2016) questionnaire was adjusted for this study. Table 2 shows the results of the questionnaires.

*Table 2: The Result of Student's Questionnaires*

| Questions | Students' Answer | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | Netral | No |
| 1. The game was easy to play. | 18 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. The use of these games made me happy to take online English classes. | 18 | 0 | 0 |
| 3. The use of these games encouraged me to enjoy the teaching-learning process. | 18 | 0 | 0 |
| 4. The use of these games motivated me to learn English online. | 18 | 0 | 0 |
| 5. The use of these games provided more opportunities for timid students to express their opinions and feelings using English. | 11 | 4 | 3 |
| 6. The use of these games helped me remember new words faster and better. | 16 | 0 | 2 |
| 7. The use of these games helped me understand English more easily. | 17 | 0 | 1 |
| 8. The use of these games encouraged me to try to be a winner throughout the play. | 12 | 1 | 5 |

The survey findings suggest that the majority of students perceive the Wordwall and Quizizz programs' word games to be simple to use. A total of 18 students agreed that playing word games to study online made them joyful and engaged during the process. The findings also reveal that most students felt motivated in this online learning through the implementation of the games. Students also felt that implementing word games allowed them to express their opinions using English. Most students also felt that implementing word games quickly helped them retain new vocabulary. During online learning using word games, students also found them helpful to understand English easily. Finally, incorporating a word game drove students to compete in their English studies. The findings of the questionnaire in Table 2 illustrate this. When it came to the last question, up to 12 students said they wanted to win and be on top while playing word games. This suggests that students' vocabulary mastery is boosted by word games.

In addition to observations and surveys, the researcher developed assessments that included a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test was delivered to students the day before the games were implemented. The purpose was to determine and assess how well students knew English vocabulary. Meanwhile, the post-test was administered the day after the word games were implemented. The results of the pre-test and post-test were as follows. The pre-test was taken by 18 students. Only 1 student, or 5.5 percent of students, out of 18 succeeded and received a score over 75. In other words, on average, students scored

58. A post-test was conducted after the word games were implemented, and the findings showed that out of 18 students who did on it, 15 students scored over 75, or 83 percent of students succeeded, with an average student score of 85.

From the pre-test and post-test results, it can be concluded that there was an increase from pre-test to post-test of 78%. The average score of students also rose from 58 to 85 or increased by 27 points. It was due to the teacher's excellent implementation of word games during online learning and supported by students who were willing to take classes even though the course was performed online. It can also be interpreted that online learning by implementing word games can improve students' vocabulary mastery.

**Discussion**

In cycle 1 or online learning using word games, many students seemed to have difficulty participating in the classroom. Many students were still confused about operating the Quizizz and Wordwall applications since they were still new to them. To overcome this, before students used the applications, the teacher gave instructions to students in operating the application so that students could efficiently operate Quizizz and Wordwall. In addition, the teacher also still seemed to have not mastered the learning material and looked confused in integrating the games into learning. In cycle 1, the students were still poor in knowing the meaning of specific words, pronouncing them, understanding grammar, and spelling the vocabulary. As a result, the researcher designed a word game based on matching the picture or setting on the Wordwall to circumvent this limitation for the "Meaning" section. Meanwhile, the teacher urged the students to rehearse the pronunciation of the vocabulary and devised a homophone game on the same application for "Pronunciation." For "Grammar," the researcher made activities in Quizizz, and for "Spelling," the researcher made a crossword puzzle through Wordwall. Some students still had difficulty partaking in these activities. This may be because they could still not correctly follow the learning process. These constraints were evident in all the variables, as shown in Table 1, where most of the scores from cycle 1 were below 75%. As a result, this research needed to be continued in the next cycle.

In cycle 2, the teacher appeared to have a good grasp of the content and used the word game effectively. This may also be seen in students familiarizing themselves with word games such as Quizizz and Wordwall, allowing them to readily operate tools that help them study the language. When the researcher used the identical task used in cycle 1, the students were able to complete it practically flawlessly. This is seen in Table 1 for cycle 2, where all variable indicators achieved

a percentage of greater than 75%. It demonstrates that using word games to increase vocabulary knowledge in online learning is a good strategy.

According to Nugrahani (2017:475), excellent learning media may boost students' learning motivation and encourage them to participate actively in their studies. Donmus (2010:1497) also stated that educational games have gained importance in language instruction since they make language learning more enjoyable. It may be inferred from this explanation that the game is a medium that will aid teachers and students in gaining language knowledge if language information is presented enjoyably. Teachers may utilize technology to build educational games. As a result, the teacher uses word games to engage students in learning English, and because of online learning, the teacher also employs technology to enforce word games, such as Wordwall and Quizizz. Table 1 shows the results of the application of word games, while Table 2 illustrates the results of the observation and test (pre-test and post-test), indicating that online learning via word games makes students happy and helps them quickly acquire new English words. It can also help students become more motivated to learn. Because the school is located in a rural location, the internet network presents a challenge in adopting this method. As a result, students found it challenging to complete the quizzes until their internet connection was fixed.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that word games can improve mastery of English vocabulary during online learning. It can be seen from the variable indicators that have increased. "Meaning" increased from 54% to 77%, "Spelling" increased from 70% to 90%, "Grammar" increased from 54% to 75%, and "Pronunciation" increased from 71% to 77%. Furthermore, using word games may make students happy and enjoy studying, inspire students, assist them in memorizing terminology fast, and develop a competitive spirit among students. The findings of observations, surveys, and tests show this. Finally, word games can be a solution for teachers who have students who cannot determine the meaning of words, students who lack vocabulary, and students who believe that acquiring lingo is tedious when the teacher is conventionally explaining to them. Students may attain vocabulary in a fun and easy method this way.

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