



The Application of Communicative Games in Enhancing Students' Vocabulary Mastery: A Qualitative Study at Senior High School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 03- 18 Revised: 2026 03-30 Accepted: 2026 06-01	<i>This study examines the implementation of communicative games in vocabulary teaching in class X-B, analyzing student feedback, and identifying obstacles that emerged throughout the process. A qualitative case study design was used, with one English teacher and 18 purposefully selected students participating. Data collection was conducted through classroom observations and interviews. The results showed that the games had a positive effect on vocabulary mastery, enthusiasm for learning, and student engagement in class. Before implementation, students' basic vocabulary understanding was minimal, accompanied by weak motivation to learn. After implementation, they appeared more energetic, enthusiastic, and confident in using English during activities. Almost all students responded positively, saying that the lessons were more engaging and less monotonous. The teacher also acknowledged improvements in vocabulary understanding for those who previously struggled. However, issues such as reduced concentration in the afternoon and initial lack of confidence persisted. Overall, communicative games proved to be an effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary mastery and creating a more interactive learning environment.</i>
Keywords: Communicative Games; Student Responses; Vocabulary Learning	
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1. Introduction

English is recognized as an international language because it plays a vital role in communication, education, technology, business, and culture worldwide. Mastery of English in schools has opened students' access to a wide range of knowledge sources, international literature, and digital learning media, most of which are presented in English. With the increasing pace of globalization, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become a key skill for entering the academic and professional world (Kawakibi & Indrawan, 2024). (Tepper et al., 2022) in their research also highlighted that solid vocabulary mastery is very helpful for learners when reading academic texts and communicating across cultures in the era of globalization. Therefore, mastery of English is not only an academic obligation but also an essential provision for active participation in international interactions and increasing competitiveness in the global market. One fundamental aspect of learning English is vocabulary mastery, which forms the foundation for understanding and using the language appropriately.

Vocabulary mastery is considered essential in English learning, especially for high school students, as it forms the foundation for developing other language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, students often struggle to understand texts and express ideas clearly. As stated by (Sulaiman & Akidah, 2021), vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of English learning at all levels of education. Vocabulary serves not only as a basic component but also as a primary tool for understanding and conveying meaning. (Zuhairi & Mistar, 2023) concluded that appropriate vocabulary learning strategies have a major influence on the progress of vocabulary mastery in EFL learners, while emphasizing the crucial importance of vocabulary acquisition intended to support language proficiency in general. Therefore, developing vocabulary mastery is a primary goal in English education at the high school level.

Based on the researcher's observations during the Field Experience Practice (PPL) at SMA Negeri 4 Pamekasan, it was found that many students still experience difficulties in mastering English vocabulary, thus hampering their ability to understand texts and communicate effectively. Traditional approaches are often ineffective in maintaining students' motivation in mastering new vocabulary. Research shows that conventional teaching methods such as direct translation, dead-on memorization, and context contests are often less effective because they fail to maintain long-term retention and engagement, especially for beginners (Nurfadhilah, 2025). Students often have difficulty connecting new vocabulary with prior knowledge, while learning activities tend to rely on memorizing vocabulary lists rather than meaningful communication. Therefore, creative and enjoyable learning strategies need to be implemented to support English vocabulary mastery more effectively and interestingly for students.

The use of games in learning plays a crucial role in creating a fun, interactive, and meaningful learning environment for students. Game-based learning can

reduce anxiety and the fear of mistakes, which are often barriers to learning a foreign language (Al-Aosail et al., 2024). Communicative games are designed not only to create a fun learning environment but also to provide opportunities for students to use the target language in real-life contexts (Safura, S., & Helmanda, 2022). Through game-based communication activities, students can learn new vocabulary in a more natural, interactive, and meaningful way (HASHEMI, 2021). The application of communicative games encourages students to interact with each other, collaborate, and utilize English in relevant contexts, rather than simply memorizing vocabulary lists.

Previous studies, such as those by (Ling & Aziz, 2022), have explored the role of games in vocabulary learning. (Safura, S., & Helmanda, 2022) found that the implementation of games significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery and strengthened classroom engagement. while (Kissy Kyle Sagubay-Lozarito¹ and Ma. Vivienne J. Segumpan², 2022) demonstrated improvements in EFL students' vocabulary achievement through digital games. However, these studies focused more on digital media or general game approaches, rather than specifically on communicative games. Research on communicative games has typically focused on speaking skills or holistic language comprehension, particularly in junior high schools. Therefore, the specific contribution of communicative games to high school students' vocabulary mastery, including at SMA Negeri 4 Pamekasan, remains unclear,

To address this gap, this study aims to describe the process of implementing communicative games in English vocabulary learning for grade X students at SMA Negeri 4 Pamekasan, analyze student responses to the use of communicative games, and identify challenges faced by students when learning vocabulary through communicative games. With a qualitative approach, this study seeks to provide a contextual understanding of the contribution of communicative games in improving students' vocabulary mastery in a more interactive, communicative, and meaningful way.

2. Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative methodology in the form of a case study design. This approach was chosen considering the research objective of understanding in-depth the function of communicative games in English learning and their contribution to students' vocabulary mastery. The learning phenomenon is explored contextually through a case study design without variable modification, allowing for direct observation of teacher-student interactions during the learning process. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding for researchers regarding the implementation process, student responses, and the impact of classroom learning (Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, 2018).

The research location was determined to be SMA Negeri 4 Pamekasan, East Java. This school was chosen because of its need to improve students' vocabulary

mastery through a more interactive and communicative learning approach. Support from the school and its English teachers enabled the researchers to conduct observations, interviews, and collect supporting documents optimally and systematically.

The participants of this study consisted of one class X-B, comprising 36 students in the 2025/2026 academic year, along with one English teacher responsible for teaching in that class. A purposive sampling technique was applied in selecting the class, based on considerations aligned with the research objectives. Class X-B was chosen because it is in the early phase of English learning at the high school level, where vocabulary mastery is a crucial element that needs to be developed intensively. In addition, the active and cooperative characteristics of the class make it potential to generate rich data on the implementation of communicative games. Within the framework of qualitative research, priority is given to the depth and richness of data rather than the number of participants (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014), so one class is considered sufficient to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

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Data were collected through three main techniques: observation (pre-, during, and post-implementation of the communicative game to identify initial conditions, the implementation process, student participation, and behavioral transformation), semi-structured interviews with teachers and 18 purposively selected students (to explore responses, perceptions of effectiveness, and challenges), and documentation (including photographs, worksheets, vocabulary test results, field notes, syllabi, and lesson plans to reinforce triangulation).

Data analysis was based on the interactive model of (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014), encompassing data reduction (selection and categorization based on themes), presentation (descriptive narratives supplemented by tables and quotations), and iterative drawing of conclusions. Data validity and credibility were maintained through triangulation of sources (between teachers and students) and methods (observation, interviews, and documentation).

3. Result

This section presents research findings obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation throughout the implementation of communicative games in English vocabulary learning for grade X at SMA Negeri 4 Pamekasan. The research results are organized according to the focus and objectives of the study, namely the implementation process, students responses, and challenges that arose during the activity.

Theme 1 :Implementation process of Communicative Games

Research findings indicate that the implementation of communicative games in English vocabulary learning involves three main phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. These activities are designed to provide students with opportunities to directly apply vocabulary in communicative contexts.

In the preparation phase, the teacher opens the lesson with an apperception relevant to the vocabulary material to be learned. Several new vocabulary words are introduced according to the topic, accompanied by examples of their use in simple sentences. Next, the rules of the communicative game are explained in detail, including the objectives, procedures, and time limits, to ensure all students understand the instructions before the activity begins.

The implementation phase was followed by students individually, where each student was required to use the vocabulary they had learned through specific communication activities within the game, such as answering questions, completing sentences, or taking turns in short dialogues with a partner. Observations showed that the majority of students were actively engaged throughout the process. Although some students initially appeared hesitant to use English, their efforts to answer and convey ideas using the vocabulary they had learned were observed.

Throughout the activity, the teacher acted as a facilitator, monitoring the game, providing guidance when difficulties arose, and providing feedback on students' vocabulary use. The teacher also provided direct corrections for incorrect pronunciation or word choice.

The classroom atmosphere during the communicative game appeared more dynamic and communicative than in previous learning sessions. Students demonstrated increased focus, activeness, and direct efforts in using vocabulary through interaction, illustrating that the communicative game encouraged practical and contextual application of English in learning.

Theme 2 :Students Responses

Student responses to the implementation of communicative games in vocabulary learning were identified through interview and observation data collected from 18 purposively selected grade X-B students. The data were categorized into two groups, namely positive and negative responses, to analyze student acceptance patterns towards the method used.

Table 1. Results of student response grouping

Student Code	Student Response	Positive	Negative
S-01	More enthusiastic and less bored when learning vocabulary	✓	
S-02	Feeling shy and lacking confidence when speaking		✓
S-03	Learning is more interactive and helps with practice	✓	
S-04	Really helps with understanding vocabulary and boosts confidence	✓	
S-05	Feeling afraid of making mistakes when speaking in games		✓
S-06	Vocabulary is easier to remember and confidence increases	✓	
S-07	Having difficulty pronouncing words		✓
S-08	Helps with understanding and remembering vocabulary	✓	
S-09	Being more active and more confident in speaking	✓	
S-10	Helps with remembering vocabulary and boosts confidence	✓	
S-11	Having difficulty understanding game rules at first		✓
S-12	Helps with understanding vocabulary through practice	✓	
S-13	Learning is more fun and less boring	✓	

S-14	Helps with understanding and boosts confidence	✓	
S-15	Feeling shy when having to speak		✓
S-16	Learning is more fun and helps with vocabulary retention	✓	
S-17	Helps with understanding vocabulary usage	✓	
S-18	Helps with remembering and understanding vocabulary	✓	

The categorization results revealed that the majority of students (13 of 18 respondents) expressed a positive response to the implementation of communicative games. Learning was perceived as more enjoyable, interactive, and supported their understanding and retention of vocabulary. However, five students responded negatively to a lack of confidence, difficulty with pronunciation, and difficulty understanding the game rules. This indicates that while this method is generally accepted, psychological factors and individual ability variations remain major barriers.

Overall, these findings indicate a positive acceptance of communicative games by the majority of students in grades X-B.

Theme 3: Challenges in Implementation

Although the implementation of communicative games was predominantly positive, several obstacles were identified during the process in class X-B based on student interviews, learning observations, and English teacher interviews. The first major obstacle was the low self-confidence of some students when using English, where they felt shy, nervous, and afraid of making mistakes when speaking in front of friends (S-02: lack of confidence; S-05: afraid of making mistakes; S-15: embarrassed). This psychological factor became a communication barrier even though interactive methods were applied. Further linguistic obstacles included pronunciation and limited vocabulary, with students having difficulty pronouncing words correctly and choosing/remembering appropriate vocabulary (S-07, S-18: pronunciation was challenging). Technical obstacles arose from initial confusion about rules (S-11: difficulty understanding instructions), emphasizing the importance of clear explanations for fluency.

According to the teacher, afternoon lessons caused students to be less focused and sleepy (*"The problem is because we teach during the day, so some students fall asleep"*), despite the predominance of active participation (*"But more students are*

interested"). The teacher's mitigation strategies included re-explaining the rules, demonstrating examples, and calling on less focused students to come forward to increase participation and concentration.

Observations confirmed that these challenges were dominant in the initial phase and subsided after adaptation, with challenges stemming more from individual student factors and classroom conditions rather than the communicative game concept itself.

4. Discussion

This study focused on describing the implementation of communicative games in vocabulary learning, as well as identifying student responses and obstacles that arose during the process. Findings from interviews and observations indicated that communicative games had a positive impact on motivation, participation, and increased vocabulary mastery of class X-B students.

Prior to the implementation of the method, students' vocabulary skills were assessed as low by the teacher, who stated, "Initially, many students didn't know basic vocabulary." This underscores the underlying problem of limited basic vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary serves as a core element of language learning because it forms the foundation for other language skills. This finding aligns with (Alqahtani, 2020), who emphasized the crucial role of vocabulary mastery in successful communication and understanding of English as a second language.

The implementation of communicative games resulted in a striking transformation in classroom learning dynamics. The teacher commented, "It was quite conducive when given the game," while emphasizing the shift in student attitudes: "The change was from students who were initially less enthusiastic about learning English to more enthusiastic." This finding underscores the effectiveness of the communicative game method in creating a learning environment that is not only more active and enjoyable, but also motivates students to engage deeply, thus supporting the process of vocabulary acquisition naturally and contextually in the context of English learning at the high school level.

Recent studies indicate that game-based learning is effective in increasing student engagement and motivation in language learning (Zainuddin et al., 2020). The use of games in a language context encourages students' meaningful use of language, thereby enhancing active participation. A communicative approach that emphasizes the use of authentic language has also been shown to contribute significantly to improving students' communicative competence (Ali Derakhshan, 2020).

This method not only increases motivation but also supports better student vocabulary comprehension and retention. A teacher stated, "From not knowing vocabulary (even basic ones), they now know it," indicating improved comprehension following direct engagement in game-based communication practices. The contextual and active use of vocabulary facilitates in-depth

processing of meaning, thereby strengthening memory. This finding is consistent with (Putri, 2020), who concluded that communicative activities in English learning improve vocabulary mastery through direct application in interactions, rather than mere memorization.

Another crucial finding includes increased student confidence in speaking English. Students who previously experienced shyness or low self-confidence became more confident in speaking after engaging in communicative games. Speaking anxiety can be reduced by a conducive and relaxed learning environment. This is reinforced by (Advalina et al., 2025), who stated that a positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere effectively reduces foreign language anxiety and increases student self-confidence.

However, several implementation challenges were also identified by this study. A teacher stated, "The problem is that because we teach during the day, some students are sleeping, but more are interested in participating in the learning using communicative games." Student concentration is affected by the learning time factor. As a solution, the teacher explained, "I ask the students who are sleeping to come to the front and participate in the communicative game." This strategy illustrates the potential of active engagement in sharpening students' focus, in line with evidence that active learning approaches empirically improve students' concentration and engagement in class (Sarı M. H., 2020).

Overall, the effectiveness of this method was stated by teachers as "quite effective in improving students' vocabulary." This statement is supported by the positive responses of the majority of students to the communicative games. Therefore, the findings of this study are consistent with recent studies that confirm that communicative and game-based approaches effectively contribute to improving students' vocabulary mastery, motivation, and confidence in learning English.

Implementing this method, however, requires optimal classroom management, clear instructions, and adaptation to the learning environment. Teachers must ensure the active involvement of all students to maximize the benefits of the method.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of research results and discussions related to the implementation of communicative games in vocabulary learning for class X-B, it was concluded that this method had a positive impact on the process and outcomes of English learning, especially students' vocabulary mastery. Pre-implementation, the majority of students experienced limited basic vocabulary mastery, as stated by the teacher that many students were not yet familiar with basic English vocabulary. Post-implementation, significant transformations were observed in vocabulary participation and understanding, where students showed increased activeness, enthusiasm, and courage in using English during learning activities.

In general, student responses to communicative games were positive. The majority found learning more enjoyable, less monotonous, and facilitated vocabulary comprehension and retention. However, some students still experienced low self-confidence or pronunciation difficulties in the initial phase. Implementation challenges, such as the impact of daylight hours on student concentration, were also identified, but these were addressed by teachers through direct involvement in the game activities, ensuring active participation.

In essence, communicative games have proven to be an effective learning strategy that improves students' vocabulary mastery, motivation to learn, and creates a more interactive and communicative classroom atmosphere. This method can be recommended as an optimal alternative for English language learning at the high school level, provided it is supported by adequate classroom management and clear instructions.

Overall, communicative games have proven effective as a learning strategy to improve students' vocabulary mastery, learning motivation, and create a more interactive and communicative classroom atmosphere. English teachers are recommended to implement communicative games in a planned and consistent manner as an alternative vocabulary learning strategy to optimize student learning outcomes.

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