



# Implementation of Word Chain Game in Vocabulary Learning at MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan

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## Abstract

This qualitative study aims to determine the implementation and effectiveness of word chain games in English vocabulary learning and its impact on student engagement among 34 students in grades XI-S7 at MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan. Using a descriptive qualitative approach research method with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation conducted on February 13, 2025, this study explores student engagement and learning outcomes. The results showed that 90% of participants reported increased motivation, word chain games were able to increase students' active participation during the learning process, help strengthen memory of vocabulary that has been learned, and create a fun and interactive learning atmosphere. This study recommends the use of word chain games as an effective pedagogical strategy for teaching Islamic high school vocabulary. The use of this method is highly recommended to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process that does not only focus on memorization, but also actively involves students. The limitations of this study include a single-gender sample and a short observation period, so further research is recommended to explore a wider context and duration.

**Keywords:** *word chain game, vocabulary, English language learning, student engagement, qualitative study*

## Introduction

Language is a need that is continuously used in the world to be able to interact and cooperate between humans, as well as a means of exchanging understanding in everyday life in the world from an early age. According to Nasution (2022) Language as a means of communication has an inseparable role in human interaction. Language can be used by humans to convey ideas, desires, feelings, and

experiences to others. It is explained that language is a system used to communicate with others in order to express something. Language includes primary functions such as perception and processing of incoming speech and production of meaningful speech output, and secondary functions such as reading and writing (De Haan & Johnson, 2015).

In this era of globalization, people around the world need a unifying language that can be used for international interests or what is commonly called an international language, such as English. English is one of the subjects taught at various levels of education in Indonesia. English has become a global language used in various countries for international communication, education, and collaboration (Kortmann 2024). Therefore, English language education is the main focus in many countries, including Indonesia. One important component in learning English is vocabulary mastery, which significantly affects the four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In learning English, vocabulary mastery is very important for success in speaking, writing, and listening (Putri et al., 2024).

However, in reality in many classes in Indonesia, vocabulary learning is still a challenge, many students still have difficulty remembering and using new words because the teaching method is monotonous and emphasizes memorization rather than active student involvement. One of the factors that influences student difficulties is the learning method used in the classroom tends to be monotonous and does not actively involve students (Setyawati, 2024). Based on initial observations conducted in class XI-S7 MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan, most students looked unenthusiastic and unmotivated during vocabulary learning. This situation requires an innovative approach that can encourage student involvement and increase vocabulary retention. The use of games such as the Word Chain Game directly in class is an effective strategy to increase student motivation and involvement (Wijayanti & Sari, 2023).

One strategy that can be applied is to use educational games, one of which is the word chain game. Recent studies in 2023 showed that the implementation of the Word Chain Game has proven effective in improving English vocabulary mastery at various levels of education, from elementary school to college. Game-based learning strategies have been shown to increase motivation, classroom interaction, and memory retention (Zhang et al., 2024; Morales et al., 2024). Among these strategies, the word chain game is known for its simple mechanism and collaborative nature.

The Word Chain Game not only helps vocabulary mastery but also increases social interaction between students, in accordance with Vygotsky's social constructivism theory which emphasizes the importance of collaboration in learning (Fitria et al., 2022). This game encourages students to mention vocabulary in sequence based on the last letter of the previous word. This game allows students to actively participate, communicate, and build understanding together

(Rahman et al., 2021). In this activity, students take turns creating vocabulary that begins with the last letter of the previous word, thus encouraging memory and interaction.

This activity not only trains students' memory of vocabulary, but also increases interaction between students and creates a more enjoyable and relaxed learning atmosphere. Researchers generally apply Word Chain Game as an interactive learning strategy to introduce and strengthen students' vocabulary in a fun atmosphere. Although the approach and implementation techniques vary, the main focus is on integrating games into the learning process so that students are more actively involved in learning English vocabulary. A number of experts and language education practitioners have researched and applied Word Chain Game as a method of learning English vocabulary at various levels of education in Indonesia.

Recent studies (Augustine et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2024) have demonstrated the quantitative effectiveness of word chain games in improving vocabulary test scores. However, significant gaps remain in the literature. First, there is limited qualitative research exploring the implementation of these games in the classroom. Second, little attention has been paid to how these methods function in Islamic school (madrasah) settings, which often have different pedagogical cultures.

To address this gap, this study investigates the implementation of word chain games in grade XI-S7 at MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan. This study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) how are word chain games implemented in vocabulary learning in grade XI-S7? And (2) how do students respond to this game method? The novelty of this study lies in its focus on highlighting the implementation process in the madrasah environment, with a qualitative approach that emphasizes active student involvement and a fun learning atmosphere and something that has not been widely explored in previous studies. This study also highlights the potential of games to transform vocabulary teaching into a more dynamic, interactive, and student-centered process.

## **Method**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are research methods that use descriptions to show the results of the data collected. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was to describe in detail the process of implementing word chain games in English vocabulary learning in grades XI-S7 MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan, as well as to understand students' responses to the implementation of word chain games in class. Qualitative research usually relies on a bottom-up generalization strategy based on sequential exploration of a field through theoretically sampled (Borgstede & Scholz, 2021). Therefore, the use of qualitative methods in research can produce a more comprehensive study of a phenomenon.

The participants of this study were 34 female students from grades XI-S7 at MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan, East Java, during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The students were between 16 and 17 years old and were selected purposively based on their relevance to the focus of the study. This class was chosen because when I was doing PPL in grades XI-S7, many of the students lacked motivation in learning English vocabulary. Therefore, the researcher took the initiative to implement a word chain game in the class and make it an appropriate context for implementing the Word Chain Game.

**Table the condition at the Second Grade Students of MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet**

NO	XI-S7
<hr/>	
	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Female</b>
	<b>34</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

The research was conducted at MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan, Pamekasan Regency, and East Java. The research was conducted on 12-13 February 2025, coinciding with the English lesson schedule in grades XI-S7.

This study used three data collection techniques based on Sugiyono (2018), namely observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted for two sessions (2 × 45 minutes) to see how the word chain game was implemented, and to assess student behaviour, interaction, and engagement. By actively observing students during the implementation of the word chain game in vocabulary learning. This aims to see the learning process and the level of student participation directly in the classroom.

Interviews were conducted with 5 students in grades XI-S7 who were selected to represent various levels of participation. Interview questions focused on the experience of challenges, perceptions of vocabulary learning, and their responses to the game. Each interview lasted about 15-20 minutes. Documentation was carried out by collecting data in the form of photos of learning activities, student work results, student vocabulary lists, and other supporting documents relevant to the learning process such as short video recordings, and written notes to support research findings. These documents are used to triangulate observation and interview data.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied to observations, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to participants for confirmation. The researcher kept a reflective journal to reduce personal bias during interpretation. Ethical approval was obtained from the institution where the study was conducted. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study.

## **Results**

This study aims to describe the implementation of word chain games and student involvement in learning English vocabulary in class XI-S7 MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan. Data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. The following is a summary of the results of interviews with several students:

### **Theme 1: Increasing Student Engagement and Enthusiasm**

Observation results showed that students became more actively involved during the implementation of the game. Even students who were usually passive began to participate actively. The atmosphere became lively and collaborative. Documentation in the form of photos and videos showed students responding quickly, and supporting their teammates. Interview data supported this observation, such as Vidhi Arini saying that "At first I was nervous, but soon I really enjoyed this game, it felt different from the usual lessons". In line with that, Anjani stated that this game made English classes "more interesting and not boring". This response shows that the word chain game helps reduce anxiety in class and fosters positive emotions.

### **Theme 2: Improved Vocabulary Retention**

Most students reported that the repetitive and contextual nature of the game helped them remember new words more effectively. Nor Azizah noted, "Because it was repeated in a fun way, I remembered the vocabulary better." Bella added that hearing words from peers helped her associate them with certain situations. This was further reinforced through observations, where students were able to recall previously mentioned words even in later rounds. Vocabulary lists collected as documentation showed that many students were able to write down most of the words used during the game sessions.

### **Theme 3: Developing Social Interaction and Collaboration**

The group-based game format encouraged students to interact, help each other, and work together. Observation notes indicated an increase in verbal exchanges, especially from quieter students. Bella commented, "We had to pay attention to every word so we wouldn't break the chain, and we worked together." Nova also mentioned that they felt more connected to their classmates through the

game. This social interaction aligns with Vygotsky's concept of learning through the zone of proximal development, where students support each other's learning through peer collaboration.

#### **Theme 4: Increasing Confidence in Speaking English**

Some students stated that they felt more confident in using English because they often practiced speaking during the game. Nova Ria Fitriadi shared, "I am more confident in speaking now because I am used to saying English words in front of my friends." The stress-free and fun environment allowed students to practice without fear of making mistakes. Observations confirmed that students who were initially hesitant began to respond more quickly and clearly towards the end of the activity.

Table 1. Summary of Student Interview Answers

No	Respondent Name	Main Theme	Summary of Statement
1	Vidhi Arini	Enthusiasm in playing	Initially nervous, but then felt happy and enjoyed the game.
2	Bella	Collaboration and concentration	The game improved teamwork and trained concentration.
3	Nor Azizah	Vocabulary reinforcement	The game helped in memorizing vocabulary because the context was enjoyable.
4	Anjani	Learning motivation	Learning became more enjoyable and increased motivation.
5	Nova Ria Fitriadi	Confidence in speaking	Became more confident due to frequent verbal use of vocabulary.

The results of interviews conducted with the five students above showed that the application of word chain games in learning English vocabulary had a significant impact on their learning process and experience. The first student, Vidhi Arini, said that at the beginning of the game she felt nervous and lacked confidence, because she was worried about being wrong in pronouncing words. However, after the game took place and she began to understand the flow of the game, the nervousness slowly disappeared and turned into feelings of joy and high

enthusiasm. She felt that this game brought a new atmosphere to learning that made her more interested and actively involved in the classroom.

This shows that a pleasant learning atmosphere can reduce students' psychological barriers such as fear and anxiety, and encourage their involvement in the learning process.

Bella, as the second student, highlighted how the game was able to train collaboration and concentration. She explained that because the game is done in chains and turns, each student is required to cooperate with each other and pay close attention to the word mentioned earlier. She felt that because the game was conducted in a fun and challenging context, the vocabulary used became easier to remember and not quickly forgotten. He also said that when he mentioned or heard words from other friends, it made him associate the word with certain meanings and situations. This shows that the game-based learning approach has advantages and builds stronger semantic connections between words and their usage.

Meanwhile, Nor Azizah emphasized that the word chain game is very helpful in remembering and strengthening the memory of the vocabulary that has been learned. She felt that because the game was conducted in a fun and challenging context, the vocabulary used became easier to remember and not quickly forgotten. She also mentioned that when she mentioned or heard words from other friends, it helped her to associate the words with certain meanings and situations. This shows that a game-based learning approach has the advantage of building stronger semantic connections between words and their usage.

Anjani, as the fourth student, revealed that the game had a big impact on her motivation in learning English. She felt that learning through games made the class atmosphere more lively and less boring. She admitted that she usually feels less enthusiastic when learning with the lecture or memorization method, but with the application of the word chain game, she became more effective and did not feel that she was being forced to learn. This shows that interactive learning methods can increase students' intrinsic motivation to learn.

Finally, Nova Ria Fitriadi explained that the game helped her improve her confidence in speaking English. She felt that the frequent verbalization of words in the game made her get used to speaking in front of her friends. The more she practiced, the more her nervousness and fear of speaking incorrectly disappeared. She also felt that her speaking skills became more fluent as the game practiced quick responses in using relevant vocabulary. This indicates that the use of games in language learning not only trains cognitive abilities, but also has a big impact on students' affective development, especially in the aspect of self-confidence.

From the interview results, most students stated that the word chain game helped them remember English vocabulary more easily. They expressed that it was easier to remember words that often appeared in the game, because the game was played repeatedly and fun, the words that appeared in the game became easier to

remember. This is in line with the opinions of experts who state that the use of game media in learning can increase students' absorption of the material (Morales et al., 2024).

Table 2. Triangulation of Data Source

Data Source	Evidence of Engagement	Evidence of Retention	Evidence of Collaboration	Evidence of Confidence
Observation	Increased participation	Students recalling words	Group interaction noted	Increased response speed
Interview	90% reported increased motivation	Students recalled repeated words	Students helped each other	Reduced speaking anxiety
Documentation	Photos/videos of active play	Vocabulary notes collected	Photos of group activities	Student reflections in writing

Overall, the interview results showed that the word chain game was not only effective in enriching and strengthening students' vocabulary mastery, but also very useful in building a positive learning atmosphere. This game was able to increase students' active participation, cooperation, focus, memory, motivation, and self-confidence. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of game-based learning methods such as word chains is very feasible to be applied in English learning, especially in vocabulary mastery materials.





*Figure 1. student enthusiasm in the application of the word chain game*



*Figure 1. interview with one of the students of class XI-S7*

## Discussion

Based on the results of the study above, it shows that the implementation of the word chain game has a significant positive impact on student participation, motivation, activeness and involvement in the vocabulary learning process in class XI-S7 MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan. The results of the study show that the Word Chain Game directly in class can increase students' motivation and vocabulary mastery (Kusuma et al., 2023). These results are consistent with existing literature on the effectiveness of game-based learning (Zhang et al., 2024; Morales et al., 2024).

One of the key observations was a substantial increase in student participation. Previously passive students became actively engaged, indicating that the game created a less intimidating and more enjoyable classroom atmosphere. This supports Zhang et al.'s (2024) argument that games can increase emotional engagement and reduce classroom anxiety. The increase in vocabulary retention through repeated contextual use further supports the principle of contextual learning, where students better internalize new knowledge when it is linked to meaningful experiences.

Morales et al. (2024) also found that game-based instruction strengthened long-term memory by engaging learners in active cognitive processes. The strong collaborative interactions observed among students align with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In games, students often support each other and learn by working in groups and responding in turn. This peer-assisted learning suggests that vocabulary acquisition can be more effective in a social setting, where students construct meaning together—a key idea in social constructivist theory. Furthermore, the increase in students' confidence in speaking English demonstrates the affective benefits of game-based learning. A non-threatening environment allows them to practice speaking without fear of failure. Fun competition and peer interaction increase learner motivation and reduce performance anxiety Setyawati (2024).

These results suggest that word chain games have multidimensional benefits: Cognitively, they support memory and recall. Affectively, they increase motivation and reduce fear. Socially, they encourage cooperation and peer learning.

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## **Conclusion**

This study concluded that the Word Chain Game is an effective pedagogical tool to enhance vocabulary learning among eleventh grade students at MA Miftahul Ulum Bettet Pamekasan. Its implementation significantly increased students' motivation, participation, vocabulary retention, collaboration, and confidence in speaking. The game successfully transformed a traditionally passive learning environment into an interactive, student-centered experience. These findings support the integration of game-based learning strategies, particularly in Islamic high schools, as a means to foster active engagement and meaningful language acquisition. Based on these results, educators are encouraged to incorporate the Word Chain Game into vocabulary learning to enhance cognitive and affective learning outcomes.

However, this study was limited by its focus on a single girls' classroom in a specific educational setting. Future research should explore the implementation of this game in more diverse contexts, across different educational levels, and over a longer period of time to examine long-term impacts and generalization.

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