



# Using Teams Games Tournament (TGT) to Increase Students' Vocabulary Acquisition and Reduce Their Learning Anxiety the Case of Seventh-Grade Students at Junior High School

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## Abstract

This study focuses on two persistent issues in EFL classrooms, limited vocabulary acquisition and high levels of learning anxiety among seventh-grade students. The researcher examined whether the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) Scramble Game is more effective than traditional instruction in improving vocabulary acquisition while reducing anxiety. Using a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design with a nonequivalent control group, the study involved 60 students at Junior High School Brebes, divided equally into an experimental group and a control group. Vocabulary achievement was measured through pre-tests and post-tests, while anxiety levels were assessed using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), supported by classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis using N-Gain scores showed that the experimental group reached a moderate improvement (62%), which was substantially higher than the control group's 48%, indicating stronger vocabulary development through TGT. In terms of affective outcomes, students in the experimental group shifted from being "*very anxious*" to "*mildly anxious*" or "*relaxed*," while anxiety in the control group largely remained high. Qualitative findings further revealed that students perceived the TGT Scramble Game as "*fun, motivating, and less stressful*," promoting peer support and active participation. Consistent with cooperative learning theory (Slavin), Thus, the TGT Scramble Game effectively enhances vocabulary learning while creating a low-anxiety classroom environment, offering meaningful implications for student-centered EFL instruction.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary Acquisition, Learning Anxiety, Teams Games Tournament (TGT), Scramble Game, Traditional Method

## **Introduction**

Vocabulary is widely recognized as the core component of language proficiency, especially for EFL learners. Mastery of vocabulary enables learners to develop all four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to express ideas, comprehend messages, and participate in communication. As Haryadi (2022) emphasizes, “vocabulary is the first step in acquiring language proficiency,” highlighting its indispensable role across learning contexts. Similarly, Dalimunthe and Haryadi (2022) argue that vocabulary knowledge underpins effective communication at all educational levels. Thus, vocabulary learning is not supplementary but foundational to overall language competence.

Although English is a compulsory subject in Indonesia from elementary to senior high school, many students still face difficulties in using English productively. This problem is largely attributed to limited vocabulary mastery. Suryanto, Imron, and Prasetyo (2021) note that students with weak vocabulary struggle to construct sentences, engage in discussions, and comprehend texts. Vocabulary knowledge builds confidence and access to learning materials, yet classroom practices often fail to support this goal. Achmad (2013) explains that vocabulary teaching commonly relies on memorization and dictionary-based instruction, which lacks meaningful context. Such methods, according to Herselina et al. (2024), lead to passive learning and prevent students from using vocabulary creatively.

Traditional vocabulary teaching often results in low student engagement. Students tend to perceive vocabulary lessons as boring and irrelevant, especially when instruction is not interactive. Jambari et al. (2021) found that junior high school students quickly lose interest in monotonous lessons, leading to short-term memorization and rapid forgetting. Without contextualized and enjoyable learning activities, vocabulary learning becomes a cycle of cramming and forgetting, offering little contribution to real communicative competence.

Another major limitation of traditional instruction is its failure to address emotional factors, particularly Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). Horwitz et al. (1986) define FLA as feelings of fear, tension, and nervousness when learning or using a foreign language. In Indonesian classrooms, students often avoid speaking English due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers and teachers. Bangun and Simanjuntak (2022) highlight that this fear discourages risk-taking and limits vocabulary use in communication. Consequently, anxiety becomes a serious barrier to vocabulary acquisition.

FLA is particularly prominent among junior high school students, who are sensitive to peer perception. Purwanto and Hidayat (2022) explain that anxiety reduces participation, inhibits vocabulary development, and leads to avoidance behavior. To overcome these challenges, alternative teaching approaches are required—methods that are engaging, collaborative, and emotionally supportive. Cooperative Learning offers such a framework by promoting teamwork, mutual support, and active participation. Slavin (1995) argues that learning in groups

helps students feel safer and less anxious about making mistakes.

One effective cooperative learning model is the Team Games Tournament (TGT), which integrates academic content with structured games. In TGT, students work in heterogeneous teams and participate in friendly competitions. Yudha and Mandasari (2021) explain that TGT combines cooperation and motivation through games such as the Scramble Game. This game requires students to rearrange jumbled letters or words, encouraging vocabulary recall, critical thinking, and teamwork. Hamer and Lely (2019) report that learning through games creates a relaxed atmosphere, making students feel “more confident and enthusiastic” compared to traditional instruction.

Despite the theoretical strengths of TGT and Scramble Game, empirical research focusing on vocabulary mastery and anxiety reduction among Grade 7 students in Indonesia remains limited. Previous studies emphasize motivation, but fewer investigate both cognitive and affective outcomes simultaneously. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the TGT Scramble Game in improving vocabulary acquisition and reducing foreign language anxiety among Grade 7 students at Junior High School. The findings are expected to contribute practical insights into inclusive and psychologically responsive EFL teaching.

TGT with Scramble Game promotes active learning by shifting students from passive memorization to meaningful interaction. Aminatun and Oktaviani (2019) state that game-based learning helps students perceive English as “fun and usable,” not merely academic. The approach provides immediate feedback, rewards effort, and builds a sense of achievement, which are crucial for motivation (Dakhi & Fitria, 2019). Additionally, its multimodal nature accommodates diverse learning styles, ensuring equitable participation (August et al., 2005). Studies by Sari et al. (2022) and Rosanti and Zulkarnain (2022) confirm that Scramble Games enhance vocabulary retention, motivation, and learner autonomy while reducing anxiety.

Effective implementation of the Scramble Game involves careful vocabulary selection, group collaboration, time limits, and post-game reflection. Tuti and Ilinawati (2022) emphasize that time-bound group competition increases focus and peer scaffolding. Demirel (2019) further notes that cooperative activities promote equitable involvement. This study is particularly relevant to Junior High School, where Grade 7 students face transitional anxiety and low confidence. Integrating Scramble Game within TGT creates a supportive environment that encourages collaboration, reduces fear of mistakes, and enhances vocabulary learning. The study seeks to demonstrate how this synergy improves vocabulary skills, lowers anxiety, and increases classroom engagement.

In Junior High School, where Grade 7 students struggle with vocabulary and anxiety, this approach offers a promising alternative to make English learning more effective and inclusive. There are four research questions highlighted in this study, such as; 1) How is the implementation of the TGT Scramble Game compared with traditional vocabulary teaching methods in terms of vocabulary acquisition and learning anxiety among seventh-grade students at Junior High School Brebes? 2)

What significant difference in vocabulary acquisition does it show in seventh-grade students taught by the TGT Scramble Game and the traditional method at Junior High School Brebes? 3) How does the use of the TGT Scramble Game and the traditional method affect the reduction of learning anxiety in vocabulary learning among seventh-grade students at Junior High School Brebes? 4) How are the seventh-grade students' perceptions of the TGT Scramble Game as a method for learning vocabulary and reducing anxiety at Junior High School Brebes?

## **Method**

The research employed a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to gather numerical data alongside descriptive insights regarding vocabulary acquisition and learning anxiety among 7th-grade students. The quantitative aspect utilized a quasi-experimental design, specifically the Nonequivalent Control Group Design, which included one experimental class and one control class. The study's population comprised all 7th-grade students at Junior High School for the 2024/2025 academic year. A purposive sampling method selected two classes totaling 60 students 30 in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. Selection criteria focused on students with moderate English vocabulary proficiency and those exhibiting significant anxiety in English classes.

Data collection utilized four primary instruments, a vocabulary test, an anxiety questionnaire, an observation checklist, and an interview guide. The vocabulary test contained 25 multiple-choice questions assessing various aspects of vocabulary, such as antonyms, synonyms and usage in context, administered as both pre-test and post-test. The anxiety questionnaire was based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986), measuring communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation on a five-point Likert scale, also administered before and after the intervention. The observation checklist is documented students' participation and signs of anxiety during lessons. Semi-structured interviews with selected students provided qualitative insights into their experiences and perceived reductions in anxiety following the TGT Scramble Game intervention.

Data collection occurred in three phases, pre-test, treatment, and post-test. In the pre-test phase, both groups completed vocabulary and anxiety assessments to establish baseline data. The treatment phase involved the experimental group participating in vocabulary lessons through the TGT Scramble Game, promoting teamwork and peer interaction, while the control group continued with conventional teaching methods. The post-test assessed improvements in vocabulary acquisition and reductions in anxiety. Observations were made throughout the sessions, and interviews were conducted with selected students' post-intervention to collect qualitative data on their learning experiences.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. Quantitative data from vocabulary tests and anxiety questionnaires were analyzed using Wilcoxon

Signed Rank Test and N-Gain scores to measure improvement between pre-test and post-test results, categorized as ineffective (<40%), less effective (40%-55%), moderately effective (56%-75%), and effective (>76%) according to Hake (1999). Anxiety levels were classified based on the FLCAS scale and Oetting's anxiety scale, ranging from 'Very Anxious' to 'Very Relaxed.' The percentage formula ( $P = F/N \times 100\%$ ) was used to interpret frequency distributions. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in engagement, emotional responses, and perceptions of the learning process. The integration of both data types facilitated a comprehensive evaluation of the TGT Scramble Game's effectiveness.

## Results

### Teacher Implementation of TGT Scramble Game vs Traditional Vocabulary Teaching

The implementation of vocabulary teaching in this study involved two contrasting approaches: the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) Scramble Game and traditional vocabulary teaching. Each method reflected different instructional roles, classroom interactions, and learning experiences for Grade 7 students.

#### A. Teacher Implementation with TGT Scramble Game

The TGT Scramble Game was implemented through structured, student-centered stages that promoted cooperative learning, active engagement, and reduced learning anxiety.

##### 1) Preparation and Orientation

The teacher prepared lesson plans aligned with the Grade 7 curriculum and selected vocabulary relevant to students' daily experiences. The classroom was arranged using colored scramble cards on the board as visual scaffolding. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher clearly explained learning objectives, game rules, and procedures using simple language, gestures, and demonstrations. This clear orientation minimized confusion and helped reduce students' anxiety.

##### 2) Organizing Cooperative Teams

Students were grouped into small heterogeneous teams with mixed ability levels. This grouping emphasized cooperation and peer support, allowing stronger students to assist weaker ones. Responsibility for learning was shared among team members, and close seating arrangements encouraged discussion, collaboration, and active participation.

##### 3) Implementation of the Scramble Game

During the game, students rearranged scrambled letters or word strips to form correct vocabulary items. Teams took turns sending representatives to the board, while other members supported them through discussion and feedback. This activity integrated cognitive engagement, physical

movement, and social interaction. The teacher managed turn-taking carefully to ensure equal participation.

4) Teacher's Role During the Tournament

The teacher acted as a facilitator by monitoring group work, providing clarification, correcting errors gently, and motivating hesitant students. Feedback focused on effort, teamwork, and improvement rather than mistakes, maintaining students' confidence and motivation.

5) Reflection and Reinforcement

At the end of the lesson, the teacher reviewed answers, addressed common errors, and encouraged brief reflection on learning strategies and teamwork. This stage strengthened vocabulary retention and created a supportive, low-anxiety classroom atmosphere.

*B. Teacher Implementation with Traditional Vocabulary Teaching*

Traditional vocabulary teaching was teacher-centered and focused on accuracy, repetition, and individual practice.

1) Vocabulary Presentation and Pronunciation

The teacher introduced new vocabulary by writing words on the whiteboard and pronouncing them clearly. Students practiced pronunciation through choral repetition, with individual correction when needed. The focus was on correct spelling and sound production.

2) Spelling and Meaning Reinforcement

Students reinforced spelling by copying words into notebooks. Vocabulary meaning was explained mainly through Indonesian translation, simple explanations, part-of-speech notes, and short examples. Interaction remained largely one-way, from teacher to students

3) Written Exercises and Answer Checking

The lesson concluded with written exercises such as matching, filling gaps, translating, or sentence writing. Answers were checked collectively, reinforcing accuracy but sometimes increasing individual pressure during public correction.

**Difference in Vocabulary Acquisition between TGT Scramble Game and Traditional Method**

This part presents the findings of the data obtained and analyzed using SPSS version 29. N-Gain scores were used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between students' pretest and posttest scores after using both methods, namely conventional teaching and TGT Scramble Game in improving vocabulary acquisition in English.

Table 1. Results of the N-gain score

Descriptives				
	Class		Statistic	Std. Error
Presented	Experiment	Mean	61.68	1.169
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	59.29
			Upper Bound	64.07
		5% Trimmed Mean	61.57	
		Median	61.32	
		Variance	40.976	
		Std. Deviation	6.401	
		Minimum	50	
		Maximum	75	
		Range	25	
		Interquartile Range	9	
		Skewness	.332	.427
		Kurtosis	-.363	.833
	Control	Mean	47.54	2.294
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	42.85
			Upper Bound	52.23
		5% Trimmed Mean	47.51	
		Median	48.21	
		Variance	157.811	
		Std. Deviation	12.562	
		Minimum	22	
		Maximum	74	
		Range	52	
		Interquartile Range	20	
		Skewness	-.156	.427

		Kurtosis	.047	.833
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Based on the results of the N-gain Score test calculation, it shows that the average (mean) N-gain score for the Experimental class is 61.68 or 62% which is included in the fairly effective category with a minimum N-gain Score of 50% and a maximum of 75%. while the results of the N-gain Score test calculation show that the average (mean) N-gain score for the Control class is 47.54 or 48% which is included in the less effective category with a minimum N-gain Score of 22% and a maximum of 74%.

So it can be concluded that the experimental class using the TGT method is quite effective in improving the vocabulary acquisition of 7th grade students of Junior High School Brebes in 2025. And the control class using the teacher-centered and memorization methods is less effective in improving the vocabulary acquisition of 7th grade students of Junior High School Brebes.

Therefore, the researcher used the Wilcoxon signed ranks test to determine the effect of using 2 learning methods on increasing vocabulary acquisition among 7th-grade students at Junior High School Brebes.

Table 2. Wilcoxon signed ranks test

Ranks				
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-test Experiment - Pre-test Experiment	Negative Ranks	0 <sup>a</sup>	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	30 <sup>b</sup>	15.50	465.00
	Ties	0 <sup>c</sup>		
	Total	30		
Post-test Control - Pre-test Control	Negative Ranks	0 <sup>d</sup>	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	26 <sup>e</sup>	13.50	351.00
	Ties	4 <sup>f</sup>		
	Total	30		
a. Post-test Experiment < Pre-test Experiment				
b. Post-test Experiment > Pre-test Experiment				
c. Post-test Experiment = Pre-test Experiment				

The results of the Wilcoxon Ranks table show a clear improvement in vocabulary learning outcomes for both groups, with notable differences in consistency and magnitude. In the experimental group, which received instruction through the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) method combined with the Scramble Game, no Negative Ranks were found (N = 0). This indicates that none of the 30



students scored lower on the post-test than on the pre-test. All students demonstrated improvement, as reflected by the Positive Ranks value of 30. The Mean Rank of 15.50 and the Sum of Ranks of 465.00 indicate a strong and uniform increase in vocabulary scores across the entire group. Additionally, the absence of Ties confirms that every student showed measurable progress after the treatment.

In contrast, the control group, which was taught using conventional teaching methods, also showed improvement but with less consistency. Similar to the experimental group, there were no Negative Ranks ( $N = 0$ ), indicating that no students experienced a decline in vocabulary scores. However, only 26 out of 30 students showed improvement, while four students had unchanged scores, as indicated by the presence of Ties. The Mean Rank (13.50) and Sum of Ranks (351.00) were lower than those of the experimental group, suggesting that the improvement was weaker and less evenly distributed.

Table 3. Results of the statistical test

<b>Test Statistics<sup>a</sup></b>		
	Post-test Experiment - Pre-test Experiment	Post-test Control - Pre- test Control
<b>Z</b>	-4.789 <sup>b</sup>	-4.463 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<.001	<.001
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test		
b. Based on negative ranks.		

The statistical test results further support these descriptive findings. The experimental group produced a Z value of  $-4.789$ , indicating a very strong difference between pre-test and post-test scores after the implementation of the TGT Scramble Game. The control group also showed a significant improvement, with a Z value of  $-4.463$ , although the magnitude of change was slightly lower. Importantly, the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value for both groups was  $< 0.001$ , which is well below the significance level of 0.05. This confirms that the observed improvements in vocabulary acquisition were statistically significant and did not occur by chance.

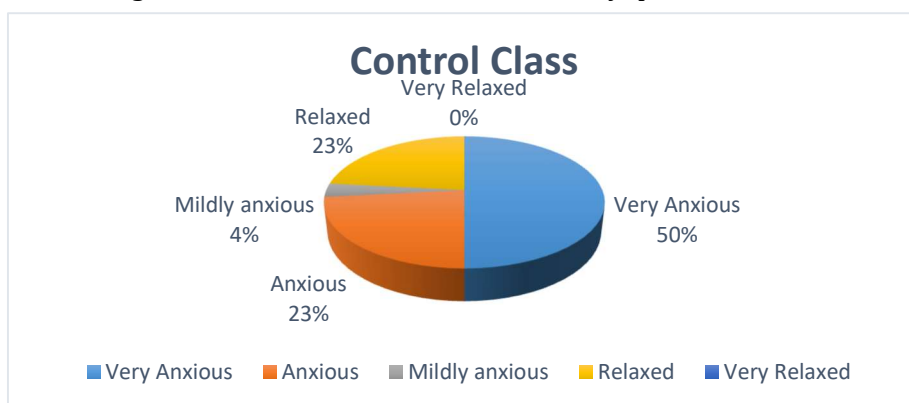
Overall, the results demonstrate that while both teaching methods improved students' vocabulary acquisition, the TGT Scramble Game was more effective, producing stronger, more consistent, and more comprehensive learning gains.

## **The Effect of TGT Scramble Game and Traditional Method on Reducing Learning Anxiety**

This section presents the findings of the data obtained and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The results of the FLCAS questionnaire adapted by Horwitz et al. (1986) were tested to determine whether there were differences between the control and experimental classes after using the conventional method and the TGT Scramble Game in improving vocabulary acquisition in English.

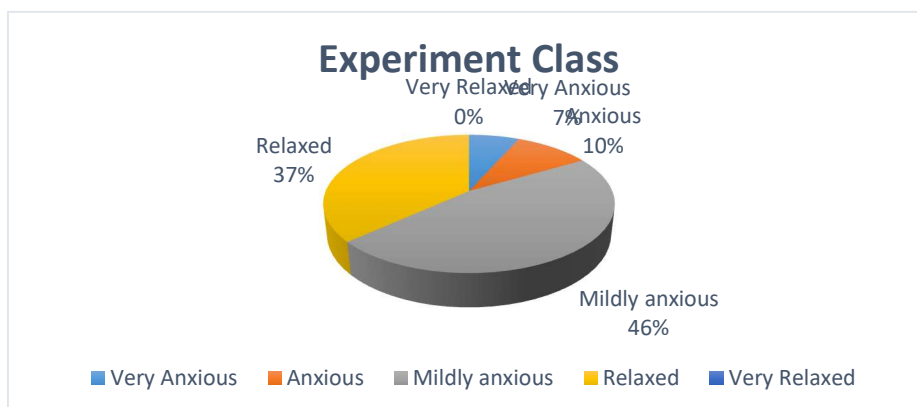
Horwitz et al. developed the "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)" to measure students' anxiety levels. This instrument assesses 33 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The participants in this study, all seventh-grade students at Junior High School Brebes, answered the questionnaire completely. The results of the FLCAS questionnaire can be seen in the diagram below.

Diagram 1. Results of the student anxiety questionnaire in the control class



The distribution of anxiety states in the Control Class is heavily tended towards higher anxiety. Half (50%) of the individuals in this group reported being "Very Anxious," representing the most significant single segment. A further 23% identified as "Anxious," meaning a combined 73% of the control group experienced high anxiety. The remaining participants were split between "Mildly anxious" (4%) and "Relaxed" (23%), with no participants (0%) reporting being "Very Relaxed."

Diagram 2. Results of the student anxiety questionnaire in the experiment class



The distribution of anxiety states in the Experiment Class exhibits a dramatically different and more positive profile, with the majority of participants reporting lower anxiety levels. Here, the largest segment, nearly half (46%), fell into the "Mildly anxious" category. This is followed by 37% who reported feeling "Relaxed." Only a small minority reported high anxiety, with 10% "Anxious" and 7% "Very Anxious." Similar to the control group, no participants in the experiment group (0%) reported being "Very Relaxed."

Based on the data from both diagrams, the comparison between the two groups shows a significant decrease in anxiety among students in the experimental class. While the results in the control class were dominated by high levels of anxiety, the experimental class showed a clear shift towards milder forms of anxiety and higher levels of relaxation. This indicates that the teaching interventions implemented in the experimental group, such as the TGT Scramble Game, were effective in reducing student anxiety, creating a more supportive and engaging learning environment. These findings emphasize the importance of innovative teaching methods in addressing not only cognitive outcomes such as vocabulary acquisition, but also affective factors such as students' confidence and comfort in learning.

### **Seventh-Grade Students' Perceptions the Use of TGT Scramble Game for Learning Vocabulary and Reduce Anxiety**

This section presents an analysis of interview data collected from ten students regarding their perceptions toward the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) Scramble Game in English learning.

#### **Interviews aspect 1: Experience in the TGT Scramble Game**

Question 1: "What was your first impression of learning using the TGT Scramble Game method?"

Interview Excerpts:

*Interview 1:* "I felt nervous the first time, but I was happy because it was a group so I could ask my friends."

*Interview 2:* "First impression, sir. I like competitions like that."

*Interview 7:* "It's really exciting, sir, like a fast race competition."

*Interview 8:* "At first I was confused, sir, but it's quite fun."

Analysis: The interview data indicate that students' initial impressions of the TGT Scramble Game were predominantly positive, despite some feelings of nervousness and confusion at the beginning. These mixed emotions are understandable, as students were exposed to a learning method that differed significantly from their usual teacher-centered instruction. Several students described being "confused," suggesting that the novelty of the activity challenged their existing expectations of classroom learning.

Common themes included:

- a) Enjoyment and novelty: Students appreciated the new learning approach, describing it as refreshing compared to traditional teacher-centered lessons.
- b) Group collaboration: Working in teams helped reduce tension and encouraged peer learning.
- c) Excitement and competition: The competitive format, where teams raced to complete word challenges, made the class lively and motivated students to participate actively.

The TGT Scramble Game created a dynamic and interactive learning atmosphere, transforming passive learning into an active, collaborative experience. Students' enthusiasm suggested that this method successfully fostered both enjoyment and engagement in English learning.

#### Question 2: Difference Compared to Previous Learning Methods

##### Interview Excerpts:

*Interview 4:* "Previously, it made me sleepy. Now, with everyone competing for answers, it makes me excited."

*Interview 5:* "Before, it was boring, writing in books and listening. Now it is exciting because I have teammates. Yesterday when I made the word 'beautiful,' my friends were shouting and helping."

*Interview 7:* "Before, we just memorized vocabulary on the board. Now, it is like playing a game, and it's easier to remember words."

Analysis: Students clearly described differences between the TGT Scramble Game and traditional vocabulary learning. In previous lessons, learning was often boring and passive. Students mostly listened to the teacher, wrote in their books, and memorized words from the board. This made many students feel sleepy, uninterested, and less involved in the lesson.

In contrast, the TGT Scramble Game created a more active and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Students felt more excited because they worked in teams, discussed answers, and competed in a friendly way. Activities such as arranging letters and racing to answer questions helped students stay focused and motivated. Several students said that learning vocabulary felt like playing a game, which made words easier to remember.

This suggests that the method supported deeper cognitive processing by engaging students emotionally and socially.

- a) Collaborative learning: where students discussed and helped one another;
- b) Active engagement: such as racing to arrange letters or solve word challenges, increased students' focus and enthusiasm.
- c) Motivational competition: creating excitement and focus.

#### **Interviews aspect 2: Changes in Anxiety Levels**

This section explores students' emotional experiences, particularly regarding nervousness and self-confidence in speaking English. Two questions guided this theme.

Question 1: Did this method help you reduce your nervousness in speaking English?

## Interview Excerpts:

*Interview 5:* "Usually, when asked to speak English, I get nervous and afraid of being laughed at."

*Interview 8:* "I am more confident, although I am still nervous."

*Interview 9:* "I am not so afraid. Even if I make a mistake, the team can help me."

Analysis: Most students reported that the TGT Scramble Game helped reduce their anxiety. They explained that speaking in groups made them feel less afraid of making mistakes because the class atmosphere was lively and supportive. When errors occurred, students did not feel embarrassed since their teammates could help them.

The group-based game reduced individual pressure by sharing responsibility among team members. Students felt safer and more confident because they were not judged personally. The game also created a relaxed and enjoyable environment, which encouraged students to speak more freely.

However, several factors contributed to reduced anxiety:

- a) Group support: Teamwork created a sense of shared responsibility, lessening individual fear of error.
- b) Relaxed environment: The game setting shifted focus from performance to enjoyment, helping students speak more freely.
- c) Positive peer dynamics: Students felt encouraged rather than judged, boosting their willingness to participate.

Consequently, the TGT Scramble Game served as an effective means of lowering affective barriers and building communicative confidence among learners.

Question 2: How do you feel when you have to speak English after using this method?

## Interview Excerpts:

*Interview 3:* "Happy, even though sometimes I speak incorrectly, I am not too embarrassed."

*Interview 5:* "Still nervous, but now I can laugh while talking. It feels more relaxed."

*Interview 7:* "Happy and brave to speak, even if it is wrong."

Analysis: After using the TGT Scramble Game, students showed better confidence and readiness to speak English. Although some nervousness remained, they were more willing to try, take risks, and accept mistakes as part of learning. The game-based activities created a relaxed and supportive classroom atmosphere. Repeated speaking practice helped students gradually build confidence, showing that the method reduced anxiety and increased students' willingness to communicate.

Patterns identified include:

- a) Greater risk-taking: Students dared to speak despite possible mistakes.
- b) Relaxed atmosphere: Humor and laughter replaced fear, creating positive learning experiences.

- c) Incremental confidence: Repeated practice within a game context gradually built self-assurance.

These responses show that the method fostered a non-threatening, supportive environment that encouraged students' oral participation a key factor in improving communicative competence.

### **Interviews aspect 3: Learning Motivation**

This final aspect examines how the TGT Scramble Game influenced students' interest and motivation to learn English vocabulary.

Question 1: Does this method make you more interested in learning English vocabulary?

Interview Excerpts:

*Interview 1:* "Yes, it is more fun because it's like a game, so it is easy to remember words."

*Interview 4:* "Yes, because you learn while playing."

*Interview 7:* "I want to learn new words so I can win when playing."

*Interview 10:* "Yes, because it is like playing a guessing game."

Analysis: All students said the method made learning more interesting. They felt that learning through games was fun, not boring, and helped them remember words more easily. Many students said they enjoyed learning while playing, guessing words, and competing with their friends. The game increased intrinsic motivation because students enjoyed the activity and were curious to learn new words. It also increased extrinsic motivation because students wanted to win the game and earn points.

Key motivational drivers included:

- a) Playful learning: Students associated vocabulary learning with enjoyment rather than obligation.
- b) Competition and rewards: The desire to win motivated them to study new words.
- c) Cognitive engagement: Interactive tasks like guessing and arranging words reinforced memory through active participation.

This finding indicates that game-based learning enhances both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, helping students to sustain interest and focus.

Question 2: If this method is used continuously, will you be more motivated in learning English?

Interview Excerpts:

*Interview 2:* "Yes, because it does not feel like learning, it feels like playing a game, so I do not get bored."

*Interview 5:* "If I do this often, I will study more diligently."

*Interview 7:* "Yes, so I can get a prize if I win."

*Interview 9:* "Yes, because it is crowded and exciting."

Analysis: Students believed that using the TGT Scramble Game continuously would keep them motivated to learn English. They said the activity feels like playing

a game, not studying, so it is fun and not boring. The crowded and exciting atmosphere makes them more enthusiastic, and rewards or prizes encourage them to participate actively.

They emphasized that:

- a) The activity's fun and social elements made learning enjoyable.
- b) The sense of competition and rewards inspired consistent participation.
- c) The interactive, playful learning environment prevented boredom and increased diligence.

Thus, the long-term implementation of this method could significantly enhance sustained motivation and foster a habit of active learning.

## Discussion

Traditional vocabulary instruction in observed classrooms followed a behaviorist model, emphasizing repetition, direct teaching, and reinforcement. Teachers typically introduced vocabulary by writing words on the board, leading pronunciation drills, and conducting spelling exercises methods aligned with stimulus-response learning (Sukamolson, 2025; Jackson & White, 2020). While these techniques aid in memorization and pronunciation accuracy, they often neglect meaningful context and interaction, which are essential for deeper language acquisition (Susanto & Nanda, 2025). The controlled practice phase focused on structured drills and individual tasks, with minimal peer interaction. Although effective for immediate recall, this approach lacked collaborative opportunities, which are crucial for language development.

Teacher-led correction further heightened student anxiety, especially among less confident learners (Rahmi, 2025). Assessments in this framework relied heavily on timed quizzes and written tasks, emphasizing individual retention. These high-pressure formats often caused performance anxiety (Sujarwati et al., 2025). Consequently, traditional methods tended to result in passive learning, reduced motivation, and limited learner autonomy (Qilichboyeva, 2024). In contrast, the TGT (Team-Games-Tournament) Scramble Game approach required thoughtful teacher preparation, including curriculum-aligned lesson plans that contextualized vocabulary in students' daily lives (Gani, 2019; Kusnandar & Febiana, 2023).

Teachers used visual aids and modeled game procedures to clarify expectations, thereby reducing classroom anxiety (Geleto, 2020). Students were placed in mixed-ability teams, fostering peer learning, mutual support, and balanced participation through defined roles such as leader, recorder, and spokesperson (Veloo et al., 2016; Rahmawati, 2021). Each session began with a vocabulary review, followed by a competitive yet cooperative gameplay phase that increased engagement and motivation. Research supports that structured competition boosts learning outcomes and mitigates stress when managed effectively (Purwanto & Leonita, 2025).

Post-game reflection sessions enhanced students' metacognitive skills,

allowing them to self-assess and consolidate their vocabulary (Yulita & Wijaya, 2025). Homework assignments reinforced retention beyond class time. In sum, traditional vocabulary teaching emphasizes memorization but limits interaction and increases anxiety. The TGT Scramble Game, by contrast, fosters collaborative, engaging, and context-rich learning, enhancing vocabulary retention, reducing anxiety, and promoting student motivation. Game-based, cooperative approaches thus offer a more effective alternative for vocabulary instruction.

The study reveals a statistically significant improvement in vocabulary acquisition among students using the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) Scramble Game method compared to traditional instruction. The experimental group achieved a higher N-gain score (62%) than the control group (48%), indicating greater effectiveness. TGT's interactive, game-based structure promotes student engagement, peer collaboration, and cognitive involvement, all of which enhance language learning. Consistency in student performance was greater in the TGT group, suggesting equitable learning opportunities and reduced achievement gaps.

Prior studies (e.g., Kusnandar & Febiana, 2023; Kong-in et al., 2025) support the effectiveness of multimedia and cooperative approaches in improving vocabulary retention and fostering inclusion. The competitive and gamified nature of TGT motivates learners and aids memory retention, as supported by Sari et al. (2022). Structured team support helps struggling students, aligning with findings by Ramadhanti & Pratiwi (2025) that interactive games aid grammar and vocabulary comprehension.

A lower score variance (61.374 vs. 141.460) in the experimental group underscores TGT's consistency compared to conventional methods. Budiyo (2020) highlights that TGT reduces dominance by high achievers, encouraging peer tutoring. Additional studies (e.g., Hamsia, 2025; Fauziyah et al., 2021) affirm that integrating TGT with other games boosts vocabulary usage, recall, and contextual understanding. The analysis reveals that the TGT (Teams Games Tournament) Scramble Game significantly reduced students' foreign language anxiety compared to traditional teaching. In the experimental group, 83% of students reported feeling "Mildly Anxious" or "Relaxed," whereas 73% in the control group reported being "Anxious" or "Very Anxious." This contrast highlights the effectiveness of TGT in creating a low-stress, engaging learning environment.

Traditional methods, relying on memorization and teacher-centered instruction, have been linked to high anxiety due to limited interaction and rigid assessments (Ahmed et al., 2022; Shaaban & Ghaith, 2005). In contrast, TGT's cooperative and game-based format encourages peer interaction, competition within supportive teams, and playful learning, which boosts motivation and lowers psychological barriers (Purwanto & Leonita, 2025). Supporting studies (Rejeki & Wahyuni, 2025; Manar & Laouar, 2025) affirm that TGT reduces speaking anxiety and fosters vocabulary development. Yang et al. (2023) further confirm that game-based learning improves vocabulary retention and pronunciation in relaxed settings.



Additionally, Kusnandar & Febiana (2023) found significant gains in vocabulary mastery with TGT, attributing it to the method's collaborative nature and varied exposure. Collectively, these findings support TGT as an effective, anxiety-reducing instructional strategy in language learning. The findings of students' interviews revealed that students generally held positive perceptions the use of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) Scramble Game in learning English vocabulary. Initial reactions ranged from excitement and enjoyment to mild nervousness, with students frequently describing the activity as "fun," "like a competition," and "different from usual learning."

These responses indicate that the game-based structure successfully captured students' attention and broke the monotony of traditional teacher-centered instruction. Similar outcomes have been reported by Kong-in et al. (2025), who found that TGT "enhanced learners' motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and classroom participation through cognitive and emotional immersion." Students' early confusion or shock aligns with Cognitive Load Theory, which explains that unfamiliar instructional methods may initially overwhelm learners; however, this effect was temporary. As students became accustomed to the rules and teamwork, peer interaction functioned as scaffolding, consistent with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory.

Compared to conventional methods described by students as "boring" and "sleepy," TGT was perceived as more engaging and memorable. Chen and Lee (2018) similarly concluded that TGT increased vocabulary retention and learner satisfaction by integrating team competition and collaboration. These findings suggest that the scramble-based mechanics encouraged active processing of vocabulary, transforming learners from passive recipients into active participants who constructed meaning through interaction and play. Beyond engagement, the TGT Scramble Game played a crucial role in reducing anxiety and increasing confidence.

Many students reported feeling "less afraid" and "more confident" because mistakes were shared within groups rather than exposed individually. This supports Horwitz et al.'s (1986) assertion that foreign language anxiety is a major barrier to language learning and must be addressed affectively as well as cognitively. Amiryousefi (2019) emphasized that cooperative, game-based environments reduce fear of negative evaluation, while Alkhateeb (2022) demonstrated significantly lower speaking anxiety among students taught using TGT.

These emotional benefits align with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that relaxed and emotionally safe learners acquire language more effectively. Students also showed greater willingness to communicate, expressing increased courage to speak despite lingering shyness. MacIntyre et al. (1998) identified willingness to communicate as central to communicative competence, and Dewaele and Pavelescu (2021) highlighted enjoyment as a predictor of increased classroom interaction. Motivation emerged as another key outcome;

students expressed a desire to learn new vocabulary “to win” or succeed in the game. According to Ryan and Deci’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory, TGT stimulated both intrinsic motivation (fun, curiosity) and extrinsic motivation (points, rewards). Over time, students believed continued use of TGT would prevent boredom and foster consistent study habits, supporting Zainuddin et al.’s (2021) claim that repeated game-based learning builds sustainable motivation. Overall, students’ perceptions indicate that the TGT Scramble Game effectively integrates engagement, emotional safety, motivation, and confidence, making it a powerful approach for vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that the TGT (Teams Games Tournament) Scramble Game is more effective than traditional teaching methods in improving vocabulary acquisition and reducing learning anxiety among 7th-grade students at Junior High School Brebes. The game’s collaborative and interactive nature fosters deeper understanding, recall, and application of vocabulary, while traditional methods, though helpful for pronunciation and spelling, lack engagement and creative language use. Students taught with the TGT Scramble Game achieved significantly higher vocabulary scores, with an N-gain score of 62% (fairly effective), compared to 48% (less effective) in the control group.

The method also reduced learning anxiety, as shown by FLCAS questionnaire results: 83% of the experimental group reported low to mild anxiety, while the traditional group had 50% of students reporting very high anxiety. The game-based, team-oriented environment helped students feel more supported and less pressured. Additionally, students responded positively to the TGT Scramble Game, describing it as enjoyable, motivating, and conducive to teamwork. It not only enhanced their academic performance but also improved their emotional engagement and confidence in learning English vocabulary.

Overall, the findings highlight the benefits of cooperative, game-based strategies over conventional, teacher-centered instruction in vocabulary learning.

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