

Gamified Vocabulary Learning for Young English Learners Through Snowball Throwing

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ABSTRACT

This community service program investigated the application snowball throwing as an instrument to augment English vocabulary acquisition among fifth-grade learners at SD Kristen 1 Dobo, situated in the Aru Islands. Teaching of English has some challenges, especially in primary school. The students do not speak English as their mother language; therefore, it is quite difficult for them to acquire English fluently particularly in rural areas. The program encompassed 29 participants and extended over three sessions, during which students engaged in cooperative gameplay that integrated written vocabulary, physical activity, and verbal expression. This approach facilitated students' comprehension and retention of vocabulary, provided them with lists of words, and instructed them on the accurate pronunciation of these terms through the use of engaging visuals and thematic content, while also modifying the classroom environment to enhance the learning process. The findings revealed a notable enhancement in vocabulary acquisition, heightened student motivation, and favorable teacher feedback. These results underscore the efficacy of embodied, game-based learning in fostering language development within an Indonesian primary educational context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, proficiency in English is no longer considered a luxury but a fundamental skill, particularly for younger generations navigating an increasingly interconnected landscape. In the context of primary education, vocabulary development serves as the cornerstone of language learning. A robust lexical foundation facilitates not only reading comprehension and writing

fluency but also the ability to engage in meaningful conversation (Nation, 2001). However, for many young learners in non-native settings, particularly in rural or under-resourced regions, English instruction remains confined to rote memorization and textbook-based exercises. These conventional methods often lack engagement, contextual relevance, and interactivity—factors known to influence motivation and retention in early language learning. This disconnect between pedagogical practices and learner needs calls for an innovative rethinking of vocabulary instruction for young English learners.

The young learners are not obligated to master all four language competencies in the same manner as learners in higher educational tiers. At the initial stages of language acquisition, young learners do not necessitate extensive elucidation or intricate grammatical frameworks in their English learning processes. Given that their cognitive development is still situated within the concrete operational phase, young learners exhibit limitations in their capacity to assimilate abstract linguistic norms (Herwiana and Laili, 2019). Individuals who embark on the journey of learning English as a foreign language during their early years require only a modest vocabulary foundation. In order to achieve successful language acquisition, it is imperative for learners to augment their lexical repertoire. Vocabulary constitutes a pivotal element of language (Clenton and Booth, 2021). Consequently, vocabulary is essential for enhancing comprehension across all four linguistic competencies. The other "half" of form-focused pedagogy, as articulated by Brown (2007), encompasses the myriad of lexical components accessible to the typical language user. In our pedagogical approach to vocabulary instruction, it is crucial to emphasize that lexical items are foundational to all four skills; thus, vocabulary should not be regarded as a "skill" in the traditional sense.

One promising direction that has gained traction in recent years is the integration of gamification into language learning. Broadly defined, gamification involves the use of game elements in non-game contexts to enhance learner motivation, engagement, and achievement (Deterding et al., 2011). In language education, particularly for children, gamified strategies have demonstrated the potential to transform passive learning into active exploration. The incorporation of play, challenge, rewards, and peer interaction creates a dynamic learning environment that aligns with the cognitive and affective characteristics of young learners (Reinhardt, 2019). Despite the growing body of literature on gamification in second language acquisition (SLA), much of the existing research has focused on technology-based solutions—such as mobile apps, digital quizzes, and virtual simulations. While these tools offer advantages in urban or digitally connected classrooms, they often fail to address the realities of rural or low-resource educational contexts, where digital access is limited or unreliable. This reveals a notable gap in the implementation of gamified vocabulary learning strategies that are both pedagogically sound and contextually grounded.

The absence of low-tech, movement-based gamification strategies in the scholarly conversation is particularly concerning given the benefits of kinesthetic learning for young children. Physical engagement has been shown to enhance cognitive processing, memory consolidation, and emotional involvement in learning activities (Shoval, 2011). Games that incorporate movement—such as role-play, scavenger hunts, or object manipulation—can bridge the gap between abstract language and tangible experience, thus anchoring vocabulary in lived interaction. Yet, few studies have systematically examined how kinesthetic gamification can support vocabulary acquisition in underrepresented contexts. This community service activity seeks to respond to this lacuna by exploring the application of a snowball throwing game—a physically active, collaborative, and low-cost instructional strategy—as a tool for enhancing English vocabulary acquisition among fifth-grade students in class VB of SD Kristen 1 Dobo.

The technique of snowball throwing has been empirically demonstrated to yield beneficial effects on students' academic performance across a range of subjects. Prior investigations concerning snowball throwing have been undertaken by a multitude of researchers and educators. Earlier research indicated that snowball throwing is consequential in enhancing vocabulary acquisition (Jaya, 2014; Kusumaningrum et al., 2019; Rita et al., 2015). Additionally, snowball throwing contributes to the

advancement of students' academic proficiency in reading (Fatimah Tenri Sari & Ahmadi, 2021) and oral communication skills (Meilinda, 2017). Despite the extensive examination of snowball throwing techniques by scholars and pedagogues, this method remains relatively underexplored within the context of elementary education. Moreover, the body of research that has applied audio-visual media in conjunction with the snowball throwing technique to facilitate vocabulary enhancement is notably limited. Consequently, the present study seeks to amalgamate the snowball throwing technique with video content from YouTube as a pedagogical medium for vocabulary instruction. The utilization of YouTube videos as an audio-visual resource provides an authentic context for English language acquisition. Furthermore, it enables children to audibly engage with and accurately articulate English vocabulary.

The technique of snowball throwing is widely recognized as a method for fostering an environment conducive to joyful learning. Joyful learning constitutes a particular educational process or experience that can significantly enhance a student's enthusiasm towards teaching and learning activities. Generally, conventional pedagogical approaches tend to induce a state of ennui among students, resulting in passive behavior within the classroom setting. By engaging in experimental activities, collaborative group work, and similar endeavors, learners can achieve a higher level of participation in the educational process. Active learning methodologies are deemed more effective than merely compelling students to rote memorize instructional content. In order to promote optimal information processing and the retention of knowledge over the long term, educators must cultivate an engaging learning atmosphere and instill a sense of joy within their students (Singh, 2014). Furthermore, the snowball-throwing pedagogical approach is intrinsically linked to the concept of joyful learning; specifically, Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which integrates real-world contexts into the educational experience.

By targeting the specific needs of young English learners at SD Kristen 1 Dobo, this program offers both practical and theoretical contributions. Practically, it provides educators with a replicable model of gamified vocabulary instruction that does not depend on advanced technology. Theoretically, it challenges the prevailing emphasis on digital gamification in the literature by illustrating the pedagogical effectiveness of embodied, socially interactive learning activities. Therefore, the aim of this community service program is to present the design, implementation, and outcomes of a vocabulary learning activity that uses snowball throwing as a gamified strategy to foster vocabulary acquisition, engagement, and enjoyment among young learners in a low-resource setting.

2. METHODS

2.1 Participants

The community service activity was conducted at SD Kristen 1 Dobo, located in a remote region of Maluku. The participants were 29 fifth-grade students aged between 10 and 11 years old. These students represented a diverse range of English proficiency levels, with most categorized as beginners. The students had previously been introduced to English vocabulary related to animals and parts of the human body through traditional classroom instruction.

2.2 Topics and Materials Vocabulary

Before conducting the snowball throwing technique, the teacher prepared the kinds of things that can help the work of it in the teaching activities. Pictures, related to the topic, the audio track, and the students' worksheets (videos), were useful in supporting the implementation of the snowball-throwing technique. To augment the lexical inventory of students, the project incorporated one supplementary classification of vocabulary, colors. This classification was meticulously chosen in consideration of their pertinence to the experiences of the students. The teacher supported by giving more practice about the using snowball throwing to make the students easier in understanding and memorizing the word, giving list of vocabulary then told them how to pronounce the words correctly, the researcher gave the

interesting picture and topic, and modifying the classroom as long as it helps learning process. The objective of these instructional sessions was to guarantee that all students attained an adequate level of familiarity with the semantic content and phonological aspects of novel vocabulary items, thereby enabling them to engage with greater assurance in the ensuing oral communication activities.

2.3 Game Structure: Snowball Throwing

There were some steps in conducting the snowball throwing technique. They are:

1. Introducing about Snowball Throwing Technique
2. Explain the goal of learning using Snowball Throwing Technique
3. Tells the student about the objective of the lesson
4. Giving one topic for the student about the topic
5. Asking the student to stand up
6. Teacher plays the children music using computer/tape recorder
7. The teacher throws the ball to the first student
8. The teacher stops the music then the teacher shows a picture about the topic
9. The teacher explains and gives simple question that related to the picture

2.4 Procedure

During the course of this project, the primary activities can be delineated into three distinct stages; in the preliminary activities, the students were presented with a series of inquiries pertaining to the audio-visual song, aimed at enhancing the students' existing background knowledge. Subsequently, the educator articulated and enunciated the vocabulary in alignment with the visual aids, which the students then echoed. The project also provided an illustrative example of the application of the vocabulary within a straightforward sentence. In the intermediate activities, the instructor demonstrated the mechanics of the snowball throwing game. Following this demonstration, the students engaged in the practice of snowball throwing collaboratively within groups. As the students executed the technique, the educator observed the students' responses. When the students encountered challenges, they were permitted to seek clarification, thereby positioning the teacher's role as one of guidance and assistance. In the concluding activities, the students were administered a quiz, which they completed autonomously.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The application of the snowball-throwing pedagogical technique has the potential to enhance students' retention of vocabulary. The elements that may contribute to the enhancement of this technique are delineated as follows: firstly, the incorporation of colorful imagery can catalyze students' interest in learning the English language and elucidate the meanings of the vocabulary. Secondly, the utilization of songs (audio-visual materials) as opposed to solely visual stimuli can also invigorate their listening skills, enabling them to acquire pronunciation akin to that of a native speaker. The songs are deemed more authentic as they are sourced from the internet (YouTube videos) that feature original performances by native speakers. This format facilitates the imitation and retention of vocabulary. Thirdly, during the activities, students collaboratively share and practice the vocabulary within groups, thereby augmenting their lexical repertoire. Fourthly, the group dynamics alleviate feelings of shyness or apprehension as peers provide support when individuals struggle to recall vocabulary. Fifthly, students are assigned homework that is to be completed independently. This homework incorporates visual prompts, requiring students to label the images, thereby reinforcing the vocabulary previously instructed.





The snowball throwing game successfully addressed the limitations of traditional vocabulary instruction by integrating physical movement, peer interaction, and gamification. The findings align with existing research that supports multisensory and experiential approaches in young learners' language acquisition. It enhances the engagement levels of students. Furthermore, it fosters their self-efficacy through collaborative tasks and promotes effective collaboration within their peer groups. Students demonstrated active participation in the activities. This is analogous to the findings reported by Apsari et al. (2019), which indicate that this pedagogical approach can augment students' involvement in classroom activities due to the necessity of collaborative engagement with their peers.

The incorporation of multimedia resources, including visual imagery and auditory elements from YouTube videos, within the pedagogical framework of snowball throwing methodologies has the potential to captivate student interest. The deployment of such media aims to enhance the attractiveness of the educational process (Fitriana, 2019). Engaging students' attention may consequently invigorate their intrinsic motivation to learn. Motivation is widely regarded as a pivotal determinant elucidating individual variance in the acquisition of English as a second or foreign language (Leona et al., 2021). This aligns with antecedent studies indicating that visual aids can augment learners' vocabulary (Pasaribu et al., 2021; Sari et al., 2022). Furthermore, the utilization of YouTube has been shown to enhance students' linguistic competencies (Meilinda, 2017). Additionally, the implementation of a cooperative learning model, specifically snowball throwing accompanied by instructional video media, can enable students to actively construct their knowledge, as it adheres to the foundational principles underlying the development of cooperative learning frameworks, notably cognitive theory (Polangitan et al., 2022). Moreover, innovative and efficacious instructional strategies could foster a constructive role for collaborative pair work in facilitating vocabulary acquisition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for elementary-aged children (Tseng et al., 2020). Future implementations could consider extending the vocabulary themes and increasing the duration of activities.

4. CONCLUSION

This community service project has demonstrated that gamified vocabulary learning through snowball throwing is not only feasible in low-resource primary education contexts but also effective in fostering vocabulary acquisition, learner motivation, and classroom engagement. The adoption of the snowball-throwing pedagogical technique has the potential to enhance the overall ambiance of the

classroom, in addition to facilitating students' retention of vocabulary. This phenomenon is aligned with the principles underpinning the theory of joyful learning. Students can engage with the lesson in a manner that is both enjoyable and effective. This method can enrich the educational experience, fostering greater student engagement and cultivating emotional intelligence attributes such as self-assurance, collaborative skills through group activities, and courage. Notable advancements can be observed in both vocabulary acquisition and student participation during the application of this technique. The process of vocabulary retention can be significantly enhanced through the implementation of snowball throwing. Furthermore, the incorporation of multimedia resources in this initiative may play a pivotal role in augmenting students' academic achievements, including the utilization of colorful visuals, audio-visual materials sourced from platforms like YouTube, and collaborative group endeavors.

Moreover, the project reinforces the pedagogical relevance of kinesthetic and experiential learning theories, which emphasize the integration of body and mind in the learning process. For young learners, especially, language acquisition is most effective when embedded in action, play, and social interaction. This insight should inform future teaching practices and curriculum design, particularly in settings where conventional approaches fail to resonate with learners' interests and learning styles.

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