

Word Chain Game in EFL Classroom: Revisiting English Teaching Vocabulary

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1. INTRODUCTION

Integrating games into the English language classroom transforms vocabulary acquisition from a rote memorization task into a dynamic, interactive experience. Traditional methods often rely on repetitive drilling and flashcards, which can quickly lead to learner fatigue and disengagement (Hasbi et al., 2025). In contrast, game-based learning leverages natural curiosity and competitive spirit, creating a low-anxiety environment where students are motivated to participate (Adipat et al., 2021; Astawa et al., 2026). By embedding words within the context of a game, learners are forced to actively process meaning, syntax, and pronunciation. As Huyen and Nga (2003) demonstrate, this playful yet purposeful engagement creates a relaxed atmosphere that helps students learn faster, significantly enhances cognitive retention, and helps transition new words from short-term memory to long-term mastery.

Furthermore, vocabulary games foster a collaborative ecosystem that mirrors real-world communication. Whether navigating a fast-paced round of Taboo, solving a contextual crossword, or collaborating on a digital word quest, students must negotiate meaning and use the target language productively with

their peers. This social interaction not only builds essential speaking and listening skills but also allows for immediate feedback from both classmates and the teacher. This aligns with the findings of game experimentation by (Octaberlina, 2023), which concluded that game-based learning can help learners acquire new vocabulary through exposure to a wide range of language and situations, and provide instant feedback and rewards, creating a sense of motivation and enjoyment as (Hartt et al. 2020) stated as various joyful element that can enhance learners' engagement and learning outcomes. Ultimately, teaching vocabulary through games does not just make the lesson more enjoyable (Hasbi & Cahyaningsih, 2024). Kula (2021) mentioned, it builds a functional, contextual foundation that empowers students to use their new lexicon with confidence that produces outcomes related to personality and behavioural development in a fun way without the need for fiction and enables the child to participate actively.

2. DISCUSSION

Revisiting game in vocabulary teaching can be established prevalent to the use of word chain game. It is a kind of game purposing to improve the player's ability to master the vocabulary word. In this section, it completely exemplifies the definition of the word chain, learning classroom steps and procedures and relevant studies on the effectiveness of the word chain game in improving vocabulary mastery.

2.1 Word Chain Game

A word chain game is a game where players must mention a thing based on a chosen theme simultaneously, or a word game in which players come up with words that begin with the letters that the previous words ended with. Originally, word chain games are variations on the Japanese game Shiritori (literally "bottom taking") that is a language game in which the players must develop a noun that begins with the final mora of the previous noun.

Although this principle of shiritori is simple, some groups of people use different local rules because different interpretations are possible about what counts as “the bottom” (Shinohara, 2009).

Word Chain is a kind of game purposes to improve the players’ ability to master vocabulary or words. According to Hemscott as cited by Abbas (2014) that said states that, “It is also a spelling aid, playing word games help create an interest in words and their spelling”.

Word chain games are specially used in the vocabulary teaching-learning process. When this game is played in a class, the first player is most likely the teacher and is followed by the rest. The theme can be decided based on the player's level (player's grade and vocabulary mastery). In other words, the difficulty of this game is adjustable. Animals, fruit and vegetables, cities and countries worldwide, and food are common themes. In a word chain game, the participants can use the last letter of the previous words to create a new word. In this game, the player must say a word that begins with the last letter of the earlier words, as in the following example:

Love - Eat – Tea - Apple – Ear, and so on.

The game can be played freely using any words in the dictionary, or restricted to specific themes like animals, food, or countries to increase the difficulty. Beyond being a fun, fast-paced pastime that requires zero equipment, word chain games are widely used as educational tools to expand vocabulary, reinforce correct spelling, and improve mental agility.

2.2 Learning Vocabulary in Classroom through Word Chain Game

Word Chain Game in learning and teaching vocabulary proposed by Muhammad and Manurung (2021) is conducted by ten stages. Here are the steps using word chain game in the classroom.

- Teacher introduces briefly the definition and the steps of the Word Chain Game to the students before implementing it in teaching and learning vocabulary in the classroom.
- Teacher discusses briefly the topics of teaching and learning vocabulary with the students.
- Both the teacher and the students write down the words to be played in the Word Chain Game related to the topics.
- Teacher instructs students to pronounce all the unfamiliar words they had written before. It is done to enable them to know how to pronounce the words and their meanings.
- Teacher instructs students to make small groups before implementing Word Chain Game in teaching and learning vocabulary. Thus, each group had four to six students in accordance with the teacher's decision. Likewise, the students should be alienated into several groups by the teacher before using Word Chain Game
- Teacher determines different topics or categories of the words played by every group before starting to implement the Word Chain Game.
- Teacher also re-explains the steps of implementing the Word Chain Game to all groups. In this regard, the teacher instructs them to increase a word engaging the last letter of the previous work in the group for about 10 minutes.
- Teacher instructs one of the groups to begin playing Word Chain Game. It is done by stating their topic and adding a word using the last letter of the previous work.
- Teacher also assigns the other groups to begin playing Word Chain Game.
- Teacher reviews Word Chain Game that has been played by the students and guides them to correct the answer.

In line with this, when a chain has been finished, teacher may discuss the words used and ask students to give an explanation about the word(s) that they contributed.

2.3 Relevant studies on the use of Word Chain Game in English Learning Vocabulary

Many researchers were talking about students' vocabulary mastery, and there were some researchers that have used the Word Chain Game. Related to this research, Medina et al., (2021) demonstrated that using the Word Chain Game to teach vocabulary mastery significantly enhances vocabulary mastery.

Moreover, Nufus (2019) gained different perspective in expanding vocabulary to enable students describing things. She presented the Word Chain Game significantly improved the students' vocabulary knowledge and ability to demonstrate the provided noun to describe. Nevertheless, recently, Lestari (2025) had current insight towards Word Chain Game. She commented it is an effective tool for improving students' vocabulary acquisition, engagement, and confidence in using new words. Teachers have applied both oral and written forms of the game, integrating it into thematic lessons to make vocabulary learning more contextual and enjoyable.

The most recent finding on the effectiveness of word chain game is depicted by Nuruddin et al. (2026). This research utilized a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework spanning two iterative cycles (planning, acting, observing, reflecting). Tracking 17 second-grade junior high students, the baseline pre-test mean score was a low 43.05. Following the first game cycle, scores rose to 58.35, and ultimately surged to 72.47 by the end of the second cycle. The iterative nature of the game allowed students to listen to pronunciation from peers, correct mistakes, and broaden their personal dictionaries organically.

Based on those research reveals, it can be concluded that the use of the Word Chain Game is highly effective in improving students' vocabulary. Word Chain Game brings some positive impacts on teaching English, especially vocabulary. Reviewing related findings on the use of word chain games with various frameworks and methodologies, it has figured out widely that this game is highly recommended to be applied.

3. RECOMMENDATION

Word Chain game is a kind of game purposing to improve the player's ability to master the vocabulary of words. Carroll Lewis, *Word Chains-the Game of Subtle Changes*, 2007, 68 www.wordchains.com/faq.php. Students try to connect the words by the way they are spelled, matching the last letter of a word with the first letter of the following word. For example, career, relocate, executive, entertain, and neighbour, where each new word has as its first letter the last letter of the word. They can use any words that they know but try to include in the chain all the new words that they are learning.

Based on the experts' statements above, it can be concluded that the Word Chain Game offers many advantages. It allows students to work cooperatively, compete with one another, strategize, think differently, compare and share knowledge, learn from others, and learn from mistakes. The game also helps create a less stressful and more productive learning environment while making learning fun.

Designing language-game classroom told us a lot about the nature of learner's creativity in which reforming a new word derived from the last letter of the previously mentioned words. It is prevalent in the way of broader imagination that has brought about the number of vocabulary words and repetitive word use. Performing the 'chain' in word level provides flowless vocabulary enhancement besides increasing word count. Thus, implementation on word chain game has been suggested towards learners and educators by the effectiveness of this game in vocabulary mastery.

Author



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