

IMPACT OF GAMIFIED STORYTELLING ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN  
CYCLE 3 EFL STUDENTS

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Ni la Universidad El Bosque, ni el jurado serán responsables de las ideas propuestas por los autores de este trabajo.

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzes the impact of gamified storytelling activities on vocabulary acquisition in secondary school students at a public school in Bogotá. With the participation of 20 students, a mixed-methods approach was applied, combining interviews, diagnostic tests, questionnaires, and field notes. The results show that the gamified strategy fostered students' motivation and interest in learning new words, while the use of contextualized materials contributed to improving lexical learning. However, it was observed that in order to maximize its effectiveness, it is necessary to simplify and adapt the activities to the students' level. In conclusion, gamified storytelling promotes a dynamic and participatory environment that stimulates collaboration and the meaningful use of vocabulary, demonstrating its potential as an innovative pedagogical strategy.

*Keywords:* gamification, storytelling, student engagement, vocabulary acquisition.

## **Resumen**

Este estudio analiza el impacto de las actividades de narración gamificada en la adquisición de vocabulario en estudiantes de secundaria de una escuela pública en Bogotá. Con la participación de 20 estudiantes, se aplicó con enfoque mixto que combinó entrevistas, pruebas diagnósticas, encuestas y notas de campo. Los resultados evidencian que la estrategia gamificada favoreció la motivación y el interés de los alumnos al aprender nuevas palabras, mientras que el uso de materiales contextualizados contribuyó a mejorar el aprendizaje léxico. Sin embargo, se observó que para maximizar su efectividad es necesario simplificar y ajustar las actividades al nivel de los estudiantes. En conclusión, la narración gamificada promueve un entorno dinámico y participativo que estimula la colaboración y el uso significativo del vocabulario, demostrando su potencial como estrategia pedagógica innovadora.

*Palabras clave:* adquisición de vocabulario, gamificación, narración, participación de los alumnos.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to the study**

For the past few years, every educational system has introduced English as a second language, recognizing its global relevance. However, English proficiency in Latin America remains low; for example, Argentina ranks 30th worldwide, while countries such as Ecuador, Peru, and Mexico show limited progress (Saavedra, 2024). In Colombia, despite a slight improvement to seventh place out of 113 countries, proficiency levels remain modest, with a score of 480 (Burgos, 2023). These data highlight the problems that continue to exist in secondary education, where many students still have not developed adequate skills to learn English. This study will explain this problem with third-cycle students (aged 13 to 16) from the Simón Bolívar School, in southern Bogotá, based on a study on the use of gamified narrative as a pedagogical strategy to improve the acquisition of English vocabulary by integrating narrative contexts with elements such as playful ones to promote participation and meaningful learning.

### **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Persistent deficiencies in vocabulary and pronunciation have been identified among secondary school students whose English proficiency corresponds to level A1, below the expected standard level for their grade (Crespo, 2024). Although these students demonstrate a basic ability to translate and express simple ideas, as their progress in vocabulary learning is limited, indicating the need to strengthen English language teaching through innovative pedagogical strategies that reinforce communication and intercultural skills. The diagnostic questionnaires, which explored how students learn, practice, and use new English words,

revealed significant challenges in vocabulary learning. Specifically, students reported difficulties with contextual application of vocabulary and medium-term retention, suggesting that their learning is not limited to memorizing terms, yet lacks consolidation in real communicative contexts.

Additionally, results evidences that most students rarely use the vocabulary learned in class everyday situations, such as watching movies in English or interacting with others, highlighting a clear lexical gap and weak connection between school learning and communicative practice (Laufer, 2009). This limitation underscores the need for strategies that transform passive knowledge of vocabulary into active use. Therefore, this study proposes the integration of storytelling and gamification as effective methodologies to foster engagement, promote continuous practice, encourage contextualized vocabulary application. These approaches aim to make vocabulary learning more engaging and interactive, and practical to real-world communication (Intriago-Cobeña et al., 2024).

### **1.3 Research Question and Objectives**

This project proposes an innovative approach to improving vocabulary acquisition among Cycle 3 EFL students through gamified storytelling activities. By integrating gamification elements such as points, rewards, and challenges, the study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of this method in promoting vocabulary development. These components guided the formulation of the research questions.

- What is the impact of gamified storytelling activities on vocabulary acquisition in Cycle 3 EFL students from a public school in Bogotá?
- How does the use of gamified storytelling influence Cycle 3 EFL students motivation and participation in vocabulary learning activities?

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the impact of gamified storytelling on enhancing vocabulary acquisition among Cycle 3 EFL students at the Simon Bolivar School in southern Bogotá establishment specific objectives to guide and evaluate the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach:

- To explore Cycle 3 EFL students perceptions and attitudes toward vocabulary learning when engaged in gamified storytelling activities.
- To analyze how gamification elements (missions, rewards, challenges) within storytelling influence Cycle 3 EFL students motivation and participation in vocabulary learning.
- To determine the extent to which gamified storytelling activities contribute to Cycle 3 EFL students vocabulary acquisition through quantitative comparison of pre-test and post-test results.

#### **1.4 Justification of the problem**

Foreign language (EFL) vocabulary acquisition is essential for linguistic and academic development, as it directly impacts reading comprehension and communication skills (Tovar-Viera, 2019). However, many students face difficulties when learning is based solely on memorization without context. Given this, storytelling emerges as an innovative approach that generates authentic and meaningful experiences, linking vocabulary to real or imaginary situations that strengthen comprehension, retention, and motivation. This study seeks to demonstrate that the combination of storytelling and gamification facilitates vocabulary acquisition and promotes motivation in EFL students in Cycle 3. Developed in a public school in Bogotá, it applied a mixed approach with questionnaires, interviews, tests, and field notes, ensuring ethical rigor and transparency. The findings offer an innovative and contextualized response to low motivation and poor vocabulary development in EFL educati

## **Chapter 2: State of the art**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and models related to vocabulary acquisition, storytelling, and gamification. Its purpose is to summarize key authors and their main conclusions, emphasizing the theoretical foundations that support this study. Thus, the chapter establishes the basis for understanding how previous research informs and guides the present investigation.

### **2.2 Previous research on vocabulary acquisition**

Vocabulary is an essential component of every language, yet the ways in which it has been theorized and taught reveal considerable tensions. Early perspectives such as Krashen (1985) established vocabulary acquisition is a subconscious process, which it is not aware of the fact of acquiring language, rather than using language for communication. This is supporting by a significant context, a comprehensible input, and emotional factors such as motivation and low anxiety. Facilitating the acquisition and internalization of new vocabulary. His claim resonates with Aguiar & Brady (1991) research, which demonstrates that children from impoverished linguistics backgrounds face particular difficulties in incorporating new vocabulary into their mental lexicon. These findings suggest that an input-poor contexts hinder retention and limit opportunities for meaningful acquisition, exposing the limitations of memorization-based instruction. Later, Fisher et al. (1994) highlights the role of linguistic input- particularly visual and context support to make learning more meaningful, such as the acquisition of verbs, which cannot be fully mediated through texts or imagery, as theses rarely captures the conceptual complexity of actions. Meara (1996) advanced the debate by criticizing the field's overemphasis on syntactic development and

neglect of vocabulary itself. His point of view is further substantiated by notion that the acquisition new vocabulary is gradual and multidimensional process that depends on the establishment a semantic connection and integration of new words into learner's existing mental lexicon, arguing for more research on the cognitive mechanisms involved in lexical learning.

Furthermore, Meara & Wolter (2004) highlight that vocabulary acquisition has been distinguished by two factors: Breadth, defined as the number of the words a student knows, and depth, determinate by the extend of knowledge of words. However, they argue that in initially stages of vocabulary acquisition, students will encounter challenges in establishing connections between these networks. Therefore, they put forward notion that the incorporation of repetition and contextual diversity is conducive to foster the lexical stability and similarity to native speakers. Meara (1996) argues this may have negative repercussions for learners' pronunciation in their first language, illustrating the complex interplay between cognitive and linguistic systems. Collectively, these authors reveal a shift from vocabulary should be conceptualized as a complex cognitive and social phenomenon. Despite these advances, Cardenas Velazquez (2019) documents expose how systematic factor continue to undermine language learning outcomes like qualified English teachers often migrated to private institutions, leaving public schools with a chronic deficit of qualified instructors, this structural imbalance persists despite the National Bilingual Program. Cardona-Escobar et al. (2023) and Benavides (2021) demonstrated that Colombian students have consistently underperformed in international benchmarks such as the CEFR and EF EPI. These results support to (Khan, 2019) argues that pedagogies transcend rigid monolingual frameworks and that mobilize students' multilingual repertoires as resources for learning.

Finally, Vélez (2017) situates English teaching within broader socioeconomic inequalities, noting it functions both as a "language of opportunity" and a tool reinforcing

global asymmetries. While English proficiency enables access to knowledge and mobility, it also perpetuates dependence on the Global North and internal inequities. Consequently, English language policies in Colombia must be interpreted as socio-political constructs embedded within historical and power dynamics rather than as merely pedagogical initiatives.

### **2.3 Previous research on storytelling**

Storytelling has been recognized as an effective tool of language learning and development, particularly from early childhood, (Ridge, 2013). Beyond narration, it encompasses diverse modes such as oral, written, and digital, that enhance vocabulary learning through meaningful interaction (Gallagher, 2011; García & Rodríguez, 2023). These modes foster linguistic, cognitive and social-constructivist development, stimulating creativity and motivation. Moreover, storytelling strengthens reading comprehension and cultivates reading habits, enabling learners to become storyteller themselves (Gregson, 2016; Patricia and Patricia, 2021). Through innovative and engaging designs, it promotes meaningful participation and learning offering flexible, sustainable pedagogical approach (Balladares et al., 2023; Rivera et al., 2022).

### **2.3 Previous research on gamification**

Gamification promotes playful learning through missions and challenges, surpassing traditional methods (Kingsley & Grabner-Hagen, 2017) and fostering innovation (Lozada-Ávila & Betancur-Gómez, 2017). Although it attracts attention, it does not ensure lasting motivation (Padilla, 2023). Studies show improvements in oral fluency and vocabulary (Pacurucu & Garzón, 2022), supported by the effectiveness of virtual environments (Velasco & Tuárez, 2021). Likewise, second language learning is more effective with structured designs (Veloz et al., 2025; Fernanda, 2021). Overall, gamification enhances motivation, fluency, and vocabulary, being more effective virtually yet adaptable to face-to-face contexts

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical framework**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the latest advances in vocabulary acquisition, storytelling, and gamification. Its aim is to synthesize recent research, highlight their conclusions, and thus offer a comprehensive overview of the areas of research that guide the present study.

#### **3.2 Vocabulary Acquisition**

Vocabulary is a crucial factor in the acquisition of the English language, providing the foundation for linguistic growth and development. Additionally, Durongbhandhu & Suwanasilp (2021) emphasize vocabulary competence enhances learners' language skills, particularly in reading, while El-Esery (2023) and Van Den Boer & Zeguers (2022) highlight that vocabulary and reading comprehension are crucial for written communication, foreign languages classes, and increase the learners' participation. With technologies advances, teaching methodologies have evolved to integrate visual and text elements that facilitate vocabulary learning. Memon et al. (2023) found that four English Language Teachers employ strategies as contextualization, personalization, categorization of words, emphasizing the exposure to the target language, the involvement of learners in teaching vocabulary and the learners' total physical response. Similarly, Andari (2023) explains how the instruction, which is considered to be conducive to the vocabulary acquisition in children, allows them to grasp, recognize, identify and categorize words in English through a cognitive process consciously and unconsciously. James et al. (2023) further notes this by linking vocabulary growth to improvements in reading, listening and writing skills, demonstrating that approaches prioritizing vocabulary learning contribute to overall language proficiency.

Additionally, this section explores the role of motivation and meaningful engagement in effective vocabulary learning. Maya et al. (2022) remarks that motivated learners are more

likely to invest time and effort into learning new words, a process enhanced when educators connect vocabulary to students' interests and real-life experiences (Shadiev et al., 2020).

(PAN, 2024) identifies strategies such as repetition and contextual practice as key to vocabulary retention and retrieval, while also advocating for practical, communicative assessment methods over rote memorization. Innovative approaches such as using role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), (James et al., 2023), have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing motivation and vocabulary retention, reinforcing the value of teacher-student interaction in learning (Xu, 2024). Finally, these studies demonstrate that a holistic approach to vocabulary acquisition—emphasizing meaningful engagement, cognitive processes, and linguistic diversity—can greatly enhance language learning outcomes (PAN, 2024).

Continuous professional development and staying informed about the latest research findings are essential for improving their teaching practices and supporting learners in their vocabulary development (Xu, 2024).

### **3.3 Storytelling**

Storytelling has been considered a way of acquiring vocabulary and knowledge through accessible visual and written methods, but the truth is that, in European countries, it has mainly been used to obtain valid and reliable data (García & Rodríguez, 2023). That (Bhatti et al., 2022; Quintuña, 2022) Continuing with this research process, the study analyzes how vocabulary acquisition is promoted in students with learning difficulties, taking into account both neurodivergent and neurotypical students. It highlights the emotional impact that is not seen in traditional methodologies but has been observed in similar studies (Barwasser et al., 2024) reviewing each individual case, an analysis is developed and extended to the social environment, examining how it influences the lexical development of each student. This contrasts with the role of teachers and families who support the process, emphasizing their joint contribution to language growth. (Benjelloun & Allame, 2023) In the

classroom setting, this viewpoint ties directly to the core of our study: using gamified storytelling activities, particularly those inspired by role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons. As we've mentioned before, this approach emphasizes interaction, looking at how students allocate their time while playing and how these experiences foster positive emotional engagement and meaningful connections with the game's narrative (Jiménez, 2019).

Previous research contributes by discussing different approaches to storytelling with a positive impact on issues of motivation (Bhatti et al., 2022), vocabulary enrichment (Barwasser et al., 2024), and reading comprehension (Benjelloun & Allame, 2023). In this sense, role-playing games, such as Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), are valid resources to promote cooperation and storytelling in the language classroom (Fraile Varela, 2023). Finally, Bhatti et al. (2022) and Quintuña (2022) conclude that storytelling is an indispensable teaching strategy that promotes reading and lexical learning, adapting to the different contexts in which it is applied.

### **3.3 Gamification**

Gamification has been one of the most significant achievements in education, as it has helped students acquire vocabulary in attractive and interactive spaces with audiovisual support, achieving autonomy with a focus on long-term activities and objectives (Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen, 2017). Based on what gamification is, we can see its impact in the classroom, which moves away from traditional methods by promoting interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, offering more engaging and interactive experiences with an approach that is more adaptable to today's world (Panmei and Waluyo, 2022). Gamification can be further utilized and developed using technologies for children (Pelález and Solano, 2023). Its educational potential has not been fully explored, so more research is needed to fully understand its benefits. (Fitria, 2023) When considering its

potential in the classroom and its technological integration, gamification stands out as a key pedagogical tool. Emphasis is placed on how game-based activities can facilitate vocabulary acquisition and encourage classroom interaction, which in turn contributes to the development of language and communication skills. (Fraile Varela, 2023) These ideas and research findings highlight what makes gamification truly effective when carefully integrated into the classroom. They demonstrate that games such as Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) can play an important role in a gamification strategy that encourages student participation and enhances learning. While it offers many advantages, we must also address the challenges it poses to fully realize its educational potential.

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## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological design employed to investigate the effects of gamified storytelling on vocabulary learning. This chapter covers the research approach, research design, paradigm, instruments, data collection methods, context, and participants. It also describes the instructional design, implementation, grounded theory method of analysis, and ethical issues that ensured the study's rigor and validity

### 4.2 Type of study

This study adopts an action research design framed with a mixed-methods approach to examine how gamified storytelling support Cycle 3 students' vocabulary acquisition in a public school in Bogota. Action research enables teacher-researchers to analyze classroom practice, design, pedagogical intervention, and reflect on learner engagement through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. TEKIR (2021) successfully employed this model to improve vocabulary mastery, while Kartika et al. (2024) implemented mobile-based instruction to strengthen lexical learning. Similarly, Sudarmaji & Yanto (2023) demonstrated that vocabulary self-collection foster autonomy and motivation in secondary educational. Collectively, these studies highlight the adaptability of action research in addressing language learning challenges through contextualized and participatory methodologies.

Likewise, this research employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data to ensure comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. According (Nunan, 2010), integrating both methods strengthens the validity, while Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado (2015) emphasize that such integration increases rigor and relevance. Following Fàbregues et al. (2023) this study specifies the sequence and weight of each

component for transparency. Grounded in the constructivist paradigm (PAN, 2024), learning is viewed as an active process of knowledge construction. Within this framework, storytelling promotes collaboration, creativity, and contextual vocabulary use through role plays and problem-solving (Zhou et al., 2024). Finally, a guide of collaborative gamified activities was designed, where students first interacted with narrative scenarios, received guided instruction, and applied their knowledge in communicative task, forming a coherent theoretical framework for investigating the impact of gamified storytelling on vocabulary acquisition.

### **4.3 Participants and context**

This study was conducted at Campus A of the Simón Bolívar District Public Educational Institution, a coeducational and inclusive school in southern Bogotá that prioritizes accessibility, equity, and holistic education. The study focuses on students in the school's third cycle, ages 13 to 16, whose English proficiency remains below the expected level (A1). The research began with 17 students but ended with 11 due to a decline in attendance. The institution promotes the development of independent, ethical, and socially responsible thinkers through scientific inquiry, technological competence, and values-based learning. It also recognizes the uniqueness of each student and enhances their cognitive, social, physical, and moral development through innovative and community-based pedagogical approaches. Students are expected to develop integrity and ethical decision-making and research skills relevant to their context.

### **4.4 Instruments for data collection**

The selected instruments seek to gather information on students' ideas, opinions, and feelings about storytelling activities and their vocabulary development through questionnaires and interviews administered during and after the research. In addition, quantitative data were obtained with creative tests based on standardized language assessments, which measured vocabulary comprehension before and after the strategy was implemented.

#### 4.4.1 Questionnaires

Whether digital or traditional, they are a widely used means of data collection as they can include open and closed questions (Jain, 2021). Although they are considered less exhaustive than other forms of data collection, questionnaires can reflect remarkable complexity when properly designed and meet established criteria, as is the case in fields such as psychology or healthcare (Yusoff et al., 2021). A mixed questionnaire was applied to analyze students' perceptions of learning English through games, combining closed and open questions to obtain quantitative and qualitative data (Taherdoost, 2022).

#### 4.4.2 Test

In education, creativity and language tests serve different purposes. Creativity tests aim to identify innovative individuals but may fail to fully capture the essence of creativity (Crockerberg, 1972). Language tests, meanwhile, can perpetuate inequalities due to their embedded social and political contexts (Ginther, 2002) Both require reform to ensure fair and inclusive assessment. For this study, verbal tests will be used to evaluate pronunciation and track students' progress over time.

#### 4.4.3 Interview

Interviews are flexible tools that enable in-depth exploration of participants' experiences through structured, semi-structured, or unstructured formats (Patton, 2015). Unlike questionnaires, they provide qualitative depth by allowing follow-up questions and capturing emotional and contextual nuances (Yin, 2016; Silverman, 2020). They are especially valuable in education and mental health research, where nonverbal cues enrich understanding (Yusoff et al., 2021). Combined with questionnaires, they balance quantitative and qualitative dimensions in mixed-methods studies.

#### 4.4.4. Field note

Field notes are tools that allow for documenting observations and analyzing classroom dynamics, promoting reflection on the part of the researcher (Burkholder & Thompson, 2020). They also offer insight into teacher-student interactions within broader educational contexts (Ruck & Mannion, 2020). In practice, they record the classroom environment, challenges, and interactions, providing insight for both students and the researcher (Yatima Yatimakhusnul et al., 2020).

### **4.5 Implementation**

To validate the research tools, a preliminary test was designed with two teachers from the school, which currently lacks a bilingualism curriculum. One teacher, the group leader and the afternoon coordinator reviewed the instruments and suggested modifications to the interview and questionnaires questions. Based on their feedback, adjustments were appropriate for the participants, a pilot test was conducted with participants similar to the study sample, and complex English vocabulary was reduced to ensure comprehension and accessibility for students.

The instructional intervention was designed to make English more engaging by incorporating elements inspired by the role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*<sup>TM</sup> (Marie & Le Blanc, 2024). Although the full game was not used, its storytelling and character-driven approach were adapted to educational goals, promoting creativity, problem-solving, and vocabulary development over seven English class sessions (Andari, 2023). The lesson included gamified components such as storytelling maps, role-play characters, missions, tasks, and rewards. Activities progressed through stages of engagement, presentation, practice and production, with students applying new vocabulary in contextualized task and projects. Continuous formative assessment was crucial for monitoring progress monitoring and

motivation. Overall, the integration of role-playing fosters a more engaging English learning experience, promoting confidence and enjoyment.

#### 4. 6 Analysis of quantitative data collection

The quantitative data were collected through implementation of pre-, mid-, and post-test to measure students' vocabulary acquisition before and after the implementation of gamified storytelling activities. The results were analyzed using the Gaussian bell, or normal distribution, to examine students' score distribution. According to Gravetter & Wallnau (2021), this model helps visualize how individual results relate to the group mean. Similarly, Singh et al. (2021), empathizes that the normal distribution underpins most parametric analyses, as it allows to determine whether data follow an expected pattern and to interpret variations objectively.

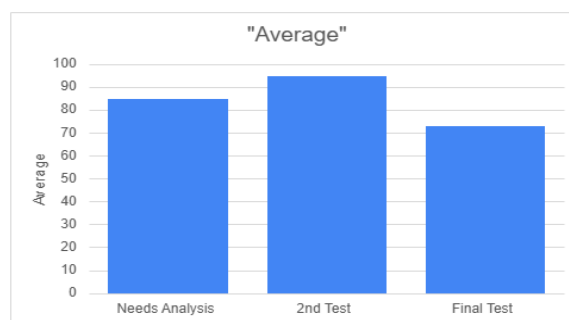


Figure 1 Average of quantitative data

The Gaussian bell curve illustrated the distribution of students' test scores, where the mean represented the general performance and the standard deviation indicated the variation in learning outcomes. Comparing the pre-, mid-, and post-test revealed a shift towards higher scores, thereby suggesting a positive impact of the gamified storytelling intervention. This supports Mackey (2016) view that statistical representation validates learning gains in SLA.

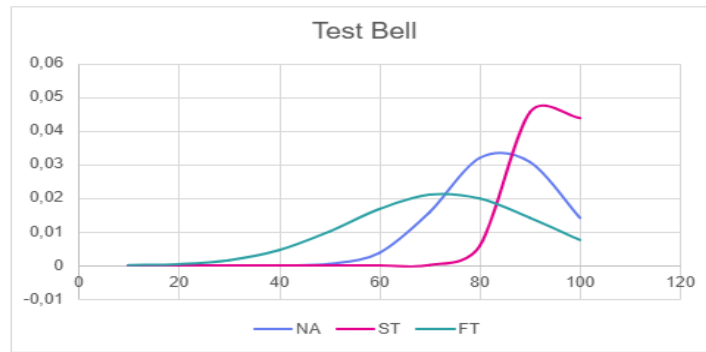


Figure 2 Gaussian Bell (Normal distribution)

#### 4.7 Analysis of qualitative data collection

This study applied Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss, as interpreted by Odis E. Simmons (2022) to identify themes and categories from the student interviews and teachers' observations through open, axial, and selective coding. A mixed-method approach integrated both qualitative and quantitative tools, including questionnaires, interviews, and test.

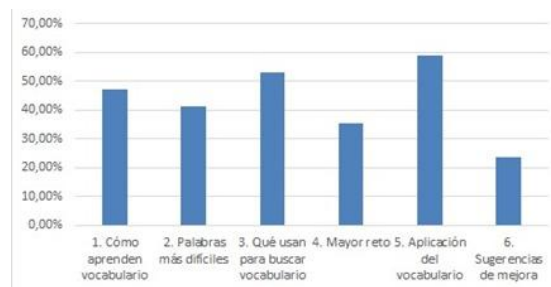


Figure 3 qualitative data collection

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize questionnaire result, revealing that 47.06% of students primarily learn English vocabulary through apps, 41.18% find phrases the hardest to master, and 52.94% often use a translator for new vocabulary. Furthermore, 35.29% struggle most with pronunciation, while 58.82% want more practice to use vocabulary effectively, and 23.53% suggested more games or interactive classes. Percentages calculated provided a holistic understanding of how gamified storytelling supports vocabulary learning and motivation.

For our survey 2, we received the following response

*"Me diverti mucho y aprendi sin darme cuenta" - Estudiante 4-*

This shows that they enjoyed the process, perceiving the game as a motivating and meaningful experience

For our interviews 1 and 2, we received the following responses:

*"Yo creo que es muy chevere porque uno aprende jugando y no se da cuenta"*

*Estudiante 1*

*"Si me ayudo a recordar las palabras y hablar mas" Estudiante 3*

They indicated that students perceive games as an effective, motivating strategy for learning English and that they, of course, value the gamified methodology.

#### **4. 8 Ethical considerations**

This mixed-methods study, conducted in a public school in Bogotá, integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the impact of gamified storytelling on EFL vocabulary acquisition. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, tests, and field notes, providing a comprehensive perspective supported by grounded theory for inductive analysis. The instructional design, based on gamification and storytelling, created an authentic and engaging environment for vocabulary learning. Ethical compliance followed Colombia's Law 1581 of 2012 on personal data protection, ensuring that participants and their parents were informed about the study's purpose, data collection, and use through consent letters. Additionally, the habeas data process safeguarded confidentiality by replacing participants' names with pseudonyms. These measures ensured transparency, participant protection, and data security, strengthening the study's rigor and validity.

## Chapter 5: Results and Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes the results of the gamified storytelling intervention aimed at improving secondary students' vocabulary acquisition in a public-school context. Based on data from questionnaires, interviews, tests, and field notes, two main categories emerged from the analysis, each supported by subcategories that reveal distinct dimensions of vocabulary learning and student engagement.

Vocabulary Development includes subcategories such as:

- *Vocabulary Learning (students' acquisition and contextual use of new words),*
- *Accuracy (correct pronunciation and lexical choice)*
- *Active Vocabulary (ability to apply learned words in communicative contexts).*

Engagement through Gamified Storytelling, which encompasses:

- *Vocabulary Engagement (motivation and participation while using new words), and*
- *Collaborative Interaction (students' teamwork and decision-making during storytelling tasks).*

The following sections examine each category and its subcategories in depth, establishing clear links to the research question and presenting evidence drawn from classroom practices.

## **5.2 Categories**

### **5.2.1 Vocabulary development**

This category demonstrates how the student group improved their ability to recognize, understand, and use new vocabulary during gamified storytelling activities (Nation, 2008). As the sessions progressed, participants continued to require teacher support to recall and apply new words; however, the data reflected a positive trend, moving from passive vocabulary recognition to more active and contextualized use. Furthermore, students reported feeling more confident and able to incorporate new words into their everyday interactions. In the final questionnaire, several students mentioned using action verbs, nouns, and adjectives outside of the classroom, suggesting a transfer of learning to real-life communication contexts.

The quantitative results support these observations. In the initial test (needs analysis), the mean score was 84.5; in the midterm test, it increased to 94.8; and in the final test, it decreased to 73.0. This decline suggests that, although students showed significant initial improvement, they struggled to maintain vocabulary retention over the long term. Field note / corroborated modest but positive progress in the use of new words during classroom interactions.

Two possible causes of the observed decline are the lack of complete correspondence between test content and the activities develop, as well as limited time for practice and reinforcement. Consequently, it is recommended that future intervention ensure greater alignment between instructional activities and assessments, and include delayed testing to more accurately monitor vocabulary retention over time.

#### *5.2.1.1 Vocabulary Learning*

The “Vocabulary Learning” category captures how learners acquired and applied new vocabulary through interactive and contextualized tasks. This category includes the

subcategory Vocabulary Use and Retention, which focuses on students' ability to recall and apply newly learned words during classroom activities. Vocabulary supports both comprehension and production (Nation, 2008). In this study, storytelling combined visual, textual, and social input that promoted vocabulary retention (García & Rodríguez, 2023; Bhatti et al., 2022; Jiménez, 2019).

Findings from classroom observation support these theoretical perspectives. For instance, students demonstrated vocabulary recall during short dialogues and role-play scenes, as documented in Field Note 1, where several learners asked for word meanings and pronunciation corrections evidence of active monitoring and awareness of their own learning. This suggests that cognitive engagement and contextualized practice contributed to both retention and the functional application of vocabulary (Van Den Boer & Zeguers, 2022; Memon et al., 2023).

Field Note 1 documents frequent vocabulary checks and pronunciation requests, indicating active monitoring:

“Students actively requested confirmation of the correct vocabulary and pronunciation during the activity.”

Field Note 1

Questionnaire 2 corroborates this interpretation (e.g., “run, attack, open”): “Me divertí mucho y aprendí sin darme cuenta... Verbos de acción como run, attack, open” (Questionnaire 2). Taking together, observations suggest narrative tasks support both intentional and incidental learning; cite Andari (2023) only if directly linked to incidental uptake.

Moreover, storytelling encourages collaboration, social interaction, and cognitive engagement, all of which are central elements in vocabulary acquisition as supported by sociocultural perspectives on learning. As students created and described their characters or

develop the story, they engaged in decision-making, negotiation, and contextualized language use. This dynamic reflects the theoretical framework, which underscores that active participation, personalization, and repetition within a social context to reinforce vocabulary learning (Bhatti et al., 2022; Sucuzhañay Quintuña, 2022). By integrating visual and textual stimuli, learners managed to categorize, recognize, and apply word effectively bridging classroom activities with real-life language use.

The activities revealed that students gained vocabulary both intentionally (through pronunciation checks and explicit repetition) and incidentally (by embedding new words into their stories). This dual process supports the findings of Andari (2023) and García and Rodríguez (2023), who highlight that gamified storytelling promotes simultaneous conscious and subconscious vocabulary learning. (2023) view that storytelling fosters vocabulary development through contextualized input. However, retention was inconsistent; some learners had difficulty retrieving target words under cognitive demands. This outcome echoes Van den Boer and Zeguers' (2022) warning that task complexity may hinder uptake when it is not carefully aligned with learners' proficiency.

#### 5.2.1.2 Accuracy

The "Accuracy" code is defined to more correctly capture their pronunciation and lexical vocabulary. This is reflected in Questionnaire 1, Question 4: "What do you consider to be the biggest challenge when learning new words in English?" Multiple learners reported pronunciation difficulties (Questionnaire 1, Q4). This difficulty aligns with findings, who argue that alternative and interactive methods can improve learners' pronunciation and accuracy, consider our results and referring to our Field Note 4, we highlight the high accuracy in word identification, but production was during the time they crated their stories.

Following the pattern of our result and these-being partly mixed, at other time, students partially remembered vocabulary but made mistakes when creating the story.

Field Note 4 highlights that, although some students with stronger proficiency helped direct the story, a lack of organization particularly in creating the ending remained a challenge.

Accuracy also interacted with other codes. For instance, high arousal sometimes traded off with accuracy (Field Note 6), as students preferred playing over retaining vocabulary (Field Note 6). Field Note 6 records that teacher intervention, supported using the “Bouncy Balls” application, redirected students’ attention and enabled them to continue with the prepared activity. For accuracy, we will take two indicators into account, one being (a) the correct form in production tasks and (b) the appropriate lexical choice for the context. It demonstrates how different codes play essential roles in the study.

Pronunciation and lexical precision persisted as difficulties. Learners often recognized words correctly but mispronounced them or produced fragmented structures during storytelling, reflecting Durongbhandhu and Suwanasilp’s (2021) finding that accuracy tends to lag behind fluency in playful contexts. While tools such as Bouncy Balls briefly enhanced focus, they did not prevent recurring errors. This outcome supports Gregson’s (2016) observation that engagement-oriented tasks may compromise precision, as learners struggled to retain accurate forms without explicit scaffolding.

### 5.2.1.3 Active Vocabulary

“Active vocabulary” emerged as a central code across instruments, strengthening validity via convergence. For example, Questionnaire 1, Question 4 (“*What do you consider to be the biggest challenge when learning new words in English?*”) elicited responses such as “*Remembering after a while*” and “*Using them properly*”. Similarly, in Interview 1, Student 4, explained: “*Yes, because you have fun and you remember more easily...*”

The researcher’s field notes also reflect this tendency. In Field Note 4, the observation states:

*“After the activity finished, the teacher transitioned to presenting the present simple, affirmative sentences and daily routines.”*

Field Note 4, line 13

In Field Note 5, the observation states:

*“The teacher is asking some students to select a specific word in order that they can create a negative sentence.”*

Field notes 5, line 9

Taken together, evidence indicates vocabulary shifted from passive recognition to active use, aligning with statements in the literature that significant and contextualized practice encourages active lexical use (Kingsley & Grabner-Hagen, 2018; Bhatti et al., 2022).

After the implementation, students reported feeling more comfortable and motivated to incorporate new words into their daily use.

Several authors emphasize the importance of active and meaningful vocabulary learning through diverse pedagogical approaches. Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen (2017) present gamification as an innovative strategy for vocabulary acquisition, promoting interactive environments with dynamic activities, audiovisual elements, and long-term goals that foster motivation and learner autonomy under teacher facilitation. Accordingly, a points and rewards system was integrated into the design to sustain engagement during storytelling tasks. The transition from passive to active vocabulary use was evident as learners reused words creatively, supporting Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen’s (2017) view of gamification as a catalyst for participation and Memon et al.’s (2023) emphasis on contextual practice. Nonetheless, consistent with Bhatti et al. (2022), motivation alone did not guarantee long-

term retention, underscoring the necessity of repetition and contextualization for durable vocabulary consolidation.

### 5.2.2 Engagement through gamified storytelling

This category examines how gamified storytelling fostered interaction and learning processes, integrating the codes Storytelling Engagement/Perception, Gamification Task, Student Engagement, Partial Engagement, and Overall Engagement.

From the outset, peer interaction and collaborative support expanded opportunities for vocabulary use. For example, narrators often constructed scenarios with classmates' assistance (Field Note 4), reinforcing García and Rodríguez's (2023) argument that storytelling supports vocabulary growth through accessible visual and written input. In line with Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen (2017), the inclusion of missions and challenges promoted active participation, demonstrating that gamification can function as a playful engine for learning.

However, the findings were not uniform. While many students perceived gamified storytelling as fun and motivating, participation occasionally declined due to external disruptions or unclear task mechanics. This pattern confirms Padilla's (2023) caution that gamification does not automatically sustain motivation. For instance, Field Note 6 reports that some students lost focus when the story instructions became confusing. Nonetheless, 78% of learners in the final questionnaire highlighted the value of play-based vocabulary practice, echoing Rivera et al.'s (2022) emphasis on enjoyment as a driver of language-learning engagement.

Student Engagement. This code appeared frequently in Field Notes 1, 4, and 5, where teacher and intern interventions redirected learners' attention to vocabulary objectives. As one observation notes, "The teacher repeated the instructions, and students immediately

corrected the words together,” illustrating (Ridge, 2013) claim that structured guidance is essential to channel attention during storytelling activities.

Partial Engagement. Documented in Field Notes 3 and 7, partial engagement was evident when students were distracted or disengaged, requiring redirection. For example, “Some students looked at each other confused, and the teacher had to model the action again,” reflecting Balladares et al.’s (2023) observation that storytelling’s impact depends on sustained listening and interaction.

Overall Engagement. Despite these fluctuations, questionnaire results showed that 82% of students valued the methodology and gamified dynamics, aligning with Pacurucu and Garzón’s (2022) view that gamification fosters autonomy and sustained interest in language tasks.

In sum, gamified storytelling promoted strong interaction and engagement, but consistent participation required explicit scaffolding and clear task design to ensure that motivation translated into measurable vocabulary learning.

#### *5.2.2.1 Storytelling Engagement*

The Storytelling Engagement code was used to identify the level of student participation and attention during gameplay, as well as the extent to which narrative elements connected with the students. For example, Field Note 3 shows high engagement during character creation; however, the character sheet required simplification, prompting a redesign.

*"The character creation papers need to be simpler for them so that they can interact and better understand the activity and participate, and as a result, teachers redesign."*

Although longstanding, storytelling can be adapted to age-appropriate, less child-like narratives that sustain engagement. as Ridge (2013) and Gallagher (2011) highlight.

*“The students were motivated and actively participated, but there was confusion when continuing the story and doubts when creating characters.”*

Storytelling Engagement assesses not only students' listening, but also their interaction with each other and their overall participation in classroom activities, also measuring their involvement in the story. By examining more closely how each author thinks, we can identify the following authors according to their position on storytelling engagement:

*“Storytelling is recognized as an effective tool for enhancing learning, serving as a medium that supports young learners and facilitates instruction in both languages (Ridge, 2013)”*

*(Ridge, 2013)*

One of our first quotes emphasizes that storytelling not only functions as a reading medium but also as an efficient teaching method that promotes participation, since our narrative component acts as an experiential engine for learning.

*“Storytelling evolves into a more narrative methodology, moving away from overly childish formats, thereby changing what is known about narrative practices (Gallagher, 2011)”*

*(Gallagher, 2011)*

Here, we can see that it not only maintains the interest of the youngest but can also evolve to a more attractive and less childish environment, thus increasing engagement and creating more compelling and meaningful stories for them. Gamified storytelling fostered active participation and heightened enthusiasm, consistent with Ridge (2013) and García and

Rodríguez (2023), who highlight its integrative and motivating potential. Learners were particularly engaged when designing characters and performing roles. Yet, when instructions became overly complex, they resulted in confusion and diminished engagement, supporting Gallagher's (2011) argument that storytelling must be adapted to learners' cognitive capacities.

#### *5.2.2.2 Storytelling Perception*

This code captures learners' perceptions of narrative tasks (engagement, motivation, cognitive effort). For instance, Field Note 3 describes character creation, where engagement was evident by observation: character-sheet complexity hindered understanding, redesign improved participation.

This highlights that storytelling not only sustains children's interest but can also evolve into a more sophisticated and attractive environment, thereby increasing engagement and supporting the creation of more compelling and meaningful narratives. Although storytelling is an established method (Parra & Ramírez et al., 2017), it proved particularly effective in establishing a connection with student engagement when heard and experienced in practice.

Questionnaires corroborates enjoyment and perceived learning (e.g., "aprende jugando..."; "run, attack, open"): "Pues, yo creo que es muy chévere porque uno aprende jugando y no se aburre..." ["Well, I think it is very cool because you learn while playing and you do not get bored..."]. "Me divertí mucho y aprendí sin darme cuenta... Verbos de acción como run, attack, open" (Surevy 1).

Evidence also shows that interaction, connection, and trust were evident in the story-creation process, which fostered engagement as part of the storytelling experience. These findings align with research indicating that storytelling integrates visual, textual, and social

elements that facilitate vocabulary retention and meaningful application (García & Rodríguez, 2023; Ridge, 2013; Bhatti et al., 2022). Ridge (2013) emphasizes that storytelling has long functioned as an experimental driver for learning, supporting engagement by making language instruction accessible in different contexts and languages. Likewise, Gallagher (2011) notes that storytelling moves beyond a purely child-centered approach, evolving into a methodology capable of generating more attractive and meaningful narratives.

Convergence between perceptions and theory supports the claim that personalized, socially mediated tasks foster retention, still, task complexity must match proficiency (Parra Ramírez et al., 2017; Bonilla et al., 2022). Learners described storytelling as a “fun and easy” method for acquiring new vocabulary. This perception aligns with Rivera et al. (2022), who contend that strategies perceived as enjoyable are more sustainable. However, test results did not demonstrate equivalent improvement, highlighting a discrepancy between students’ subjective experiences and measurable learning outcomes. This divergence reinforces Gregson’s (2016) caution that positive attitudes alone are insufficient to ensure sustained vocabulary development. Students’ preference for team competitions and image-based challenges further demonstrates that storytelling enhances attention, motivation, and lexical acquisition.

#### *5.2.2.3 Gamification Task*

The gamification task code examines how structured gamified activities such as grouping, roles, and guided mechanics provide practical support for vocabulary and collaborative repetition on vocabulary acquisition, particularly by offering interactive and meaningful learning experiences. Gamification promotes motivation, engagement, and autonomy, allowing students to practice vocabulary in contexts that combine repetition, collaboration, and decision-making (Kingsley & Grabner-Hagen, 2017; Panmei & Waluyo, 2022). Field Note 1 documents students actively creating characters and forming groups:

“Students mark their groups with an 'X' in assigned colors... While distributing worksheets, the teacher notices some groups prefer identical characters but alternate gender versions” (Field Note 1). This reflects experiential learning that supports lexical retention (Memon et al., 2023).

Scaffolding guidance also enhances comprehension and application. For instance, Field Note 4 describes how the teacher supported groups struggling with mechanics:

“Another group struggles with initiating the story and properly using the game cards. They were given step-by-step instruction, which allowed the groups to start the game and use the target vocabulary, remaining with them attentively until they grasp the mechanics and begin playing”

Field Note 4, line 6-8

Field Note 5 shows collaborative problem-solving:

*“Some students discussed the task and helped each other to find the correct answer. After some attempts, they managed to complete the activity successfully, showing teamwork and understanding.”*

Field Note 5

These examples align with Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen (2017) argument that structured gamified environments facilitate vocabulary internalization and sustain student motivation.

Contextualized production was prompted (field note 6; excerpts from questionnaire 2), which demonstrates that there was a transfer of game instructions to classroom language, where students practiced and reinforced terms in context.

Field Note 6 documents:

“Students recognized the answers more quickly and mentioned each other to complete the activity successfully”

Field Note 6

This excerpt provides direct evidence of active vocabulary use during gameplay. Questionnaire 2 corroborates this finding: “Crear y describir mi personaje... Frases y expresiones del juego (What do you do? I cast a spell)” (Questionnaire 2). [“Create and describe my character... phrases and expressions from the game (such as What do you do? I cast a spell).”] This shows direct transfer of vocabulary from the game to classroom practice. These findings align with theoretical perspectives emphasizing repetition, meaningful application, and social interaction as central to vocabulary acquisition (Lozada-Ávila & Betancur-Gómez, 2017; David, 2023).

Overall, gamified tasks positively influence vocabulary acquisition among secondary students by fostering engagement, collaboration, and contextualized practice. By enabling students to move from recognition to active application of vocabulary, gamification supports comprehension, retention, and functional use, demonstrating its effectiveness in addressing the research question on the impact of gamified storytelling in vocabulary learning.

Gamified tasks functioned as strong motivators, consistent with Kingsley and Grabner-Hagen (2017). Mechanics such as missions, roles, and challenges encouraged active involvement and autonomy, aligning with Pacurucu and Garzón’s (2022) findings that gamification fosters self-regulation. Yet, when tasks became overly demanding, learners shifted their attention from vocabulary use to navigating the rules, which led to inconsistent learning outcomes. This pattern supports Memon et al.’s (2023) claim that gamification must be carefully aligned with pedagogical objectives to achieve its intended benefits.

#### 5.2.2.4 *Partial Engagement*

The “Partial Engagement” code was observed in multiple data sources, beginning with the exit questionnaire. For instance, Exit questionnaires Question 1 asked: “How did you feel learning English words while playing...?” This is evidenced in their responses when they said that, despite positive affect, comprehension difficulties and unclear progression reduced sustained participation (Exit Questionnaires Q1; Field Notes 3, 6, 7). Results from Field Note 3 (lines 8–10) state: *“There were mixed results. This is because although there was engagement, there was also a lack of vocabulary retention and confusion when it came to how to continue the story.”* This directly illustrates partial engagement.

We evidenced that although they were involved at the beginning, their participation declined because they did not understand how to continue their narrative classroom management issues (noises, off-task behavior) required frequent redirection; unclear instructions amplified this effect in Field Note 3:

“Students stopped participating and required redirection of attention ”

Field Note 3, lines 4–6

In Field Note 6:

“Classroom management was disrupted by off-task behavior ”

Field Note 6, lines 7–9

and Field Note 7:

“Teacher intervention was needed to restore order. ”

Field Note 7, lines 10–12

Field Note 6 records:

*“The teacher had to intervene several times because the students could not maintain silence.”*

Field Note 6, lines 15–17

This shows classroom management issues linked to partial engagement. Continuing with the results, we find the following:

“...the lack of vocabulary retention is also highlighted...”

Although many students demonstrated enthusiasm, others participated inconsistently. In particular, disruptions caused by unclear instructions or external distractions reflect Balladares et al.’s (2023) observation that storytelling’s effectiveness relies on sustained interaction and attentive listening. These fluctuations suggest that learner engagement is vulnerable and closely tied to both task design and the teacher’s mediation strategies.

#### *5.2.2.5 Engagement*

The “Engagement” code indexes motivation, attention, and affect during gamified vocabulary tasks. Engagement is considered essential in language acquisition as it enhances cognitive processing, sustained focus, and active participation (Jiménez, 2019; Wright, 1995). From a theoretical perspective, emotionally and cognitively engaged learners are more likely to retain new vocabulary, apply it meaningfully, and participate actively in narrative-driven tasks (Bhatti et al., 2022; García & Rodríguez, 2023)

Interview 1 and Questionaries 1 indicate high engagement and perceived pronunciation support via apps. Interview 1 (lines 21–23) documents: “Pues, yo creo que es muy chévere porque uno aprende jugando y no se aburre...” [“Well, I think it is very cool because you learn while playing and you do not get bored.”]. (lines 27–29) includes: “Sí, porque uno se motiva más y le pone más atención...” [“Yes, because you get more motivated

and pay more attention.”]. (Q2, lines 12–14) corroborates this finding: “A través de aplicaciones... me ayuda a pronunciar correctamente y recordar las palabras.” [“Through applications... it helps me pronounce correctly and remember the words.”] This confirms how engagement translates into practice. These examples demonstrate that engagement encourages voluntary participation and repeated practice, which are key for vocabulary acquisition.

Theoretical claims (e.g., narrative immersion) align with observed collaboration and decision-making; however, competitive speed-games should be balanced with accuracy-focused tasks (Gregson, 2016; Parra Ramírez et al., 2017). Students’ preference for competitive, fast-paced, or memory-based games supports the claim that dynamic, interactive formats sustain attention and motivation. Moreover, integrating visual, textual, and auditory stimuli—as observed in classroom practice—further sustained students’ attention and motivation. Narrative games such as Dungeons & Dragons-inspired activities promote collaboration, decision-making, and cognitive involvement, reinforcing theoretical claims that engagement mediates learning outcomes (Jiménez, 2019; Bonilla et al., 2022).

These findings indicate that gamified storytelling effectively fosters engagement among secondary EFL students in public institutions, specifically ninth-grade learners. High levels of attention, motivation, and enjoyment observed in both interviews and questionnaires confirm that this approach supports active participation and sustained interaction with vocabulary. Consequently, engagement emerges as a central factor in enhancing the impact of gamified storytelling on language learning.

Overall, learner engagement was high, with participants demonstrating a strong willingness to participate, interact, and collaborate. This finding aligns with Jiménez (2019) and Bonilla et al. (2022), who argue that engagement is a central factor in language

acquisition, particularly in narrative-based tasks. Nonetheless, occasional lapses in engagement indicate that it must be continuously fostered through explicit scaffolding and effective classroom management strategies.

#### *5.2.2.6 Student Engagement*

The present study has identified student engagement as a key strength, with the results demonstrating the authenticity of the students' interest in the gamified storytelling strategy.

This phenomenon is documented in Field Note 1:

“Students AGN, AA, AC, and AV were very excited and expressed interest in being witches or warriors, while students SGS, SPM, and SDA preferred the Rogue role. The teacher...”

Field Note 1, lines 7–12

In this instance, although students initially showed some reticence, their engagement increased significantly once visual elements connected to the game were incorporated. These visuals included images representing the narrative's context, character roles, and their distinctive abilities. The integration of these resources supported comprehension and made the activity more dynamic. Moreover, students' reactions and preferences toward specific characters such as the Witch and the Rogue revealed a sense of identification and personal involvement, which strengthened their connection to the story and fostered deeper participation in the activity.

This code is supported by García & Rodríguez (2023) and Pacurucu and Garzón (2022), who both argue that student participation in language learning depends on innovative strategies that awaken interest and support vocabulary acquisition, participation in language learning depends primarily on the use of innovative strategies that awaken their interest and favor vocabulary acquisition. García y Rodríguez (2023) highlights the value of storytelling

as a pedagogical resource that entertains and, at the same time, organizes children's attention. In this approach, the teacher acts as a mediator, ensuring that the stories function as a didactic tool to progressively expand vocabulary and maintain attention in the classroom.

For their part, Pacurucu and Garzón (2022) emphasize that gamification directly impacts students' intrinsic motivation and oral fluency, as playful elements such as challenges, rewards, and interactive tasks foster autonomy, encourage active participation, and create a more dynamic and engaging learning environment.

In summary, although the two approaches differ narrative privileging teacher guidance and gamification foregrounding learner autonomy, they converge on the principle that active participation emerges from strategies that stimulate curiosity and sustain interest. Both the narrative framework and gamification dynamics were effective in promoting meaningful and lasting learning, with students particularly valuing gamified storytelling when visuals and role-play were integrated. This outcome supports Ridge (2013) view that narrative contexts capture learners' attention and García and Rodríguez's (2023) claim that such contexts facilitate vocabulary expansion. Nonetheless, engagement was uneven: while some students were fully immersed, others required frequent redirection, reflecting Parra Ramírez et al.'s (2017) argument that engagement is effective only when cognitive demands are aligned with learners' developmental levels a limitation also evident in this study.

### **5.3 Discussion of results**

During the implementation of our gamified storytelling strategy for vocabulary acquisition, students demonstrated high levels of interaction and participation, fostering an atmosphere of enthusiasm and collaboration. However, task continuity was occasionally disrupted when instructions lacked sufficient clarity.

Initial instructions were clear; ongoing reminders and visual supports were insufficient, causing repeated pauses (Field Note 1.4). Moreover, the absence of complementary strategies to reinforce new vocabulary hindered students' ability to integrate key terms into their narratives.

Instructions were developmentally misaligned for A1 learners; simplifying mechanics and modeling sequences are required. These directions were too complex for learners at their age and proficiency level, as noted in Field Note 3:

“Students asked repeatedly how to create their characters and became confused with the instructions.”.

Field Note 3, lines 8–10

While some students successfully narrated and imagined scenarios with peer support, others struggled to advance in the game or use their character's abilities, which resulted in uneven participation (Field Note 4, lines 12–15).

These findings suggest that only when cognitive load is appropriately matched to learners' proficiency can engagement be converted into measurable improvements (Field Note 6, lines 8–10).

Findings reveal that simplifying and adapting instructions to students' developmental and proficiency levels enhances the effectiveness of gamified storytelling. Exit questionnaire responses, such as, question 1, with the response on lines 9-11 being "I had a lot of fun and learned without even realizing it.". reflect high engagement and implicit learning Incorporating step-by-step guidance, visual supports, and structured scaffolding enables learners to focus on vocabulary use rather than task comprehension. Well-designed gamified storytelling improved motivation and vocabulary learning.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Challenges**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the main conclusions and challenges of the study on gamified storytelling for vocabulary acquisition. It synthesizes key findings, discusses their pedagogical implications, and acknowledges the study's limitations. Finally, it offers recommendations for future research and reflects on the relevance of gamified methodologies in public school contexts.

### **6.2 General conclusions**

The findings indicate that gamified storytelling had a positive but limited impact on vocabulary acquisition. Although students showed greater interaction and recognition of target words, pre- and post-tests result did not yield statistically significant gains, suggesting partial consolidation of learning. Nevertheless, qualitative data from, interviews, and field notes revealed increased confidence, willingness to use new vocabulary, and a gradual shift from passive recognition to active use, particularly when supported by visual and structured guidance, consistent with Nation (2001) model of incremental lexical acquisition.

In terms of motivation and participation, gamified elements such as missions, challenges, and rewards significantly increased engagement and collaborative learning. Students responded enthusiastically to create and personalized activities, showing emotional investment throughout lessons. However, participation varied with some learners requiring additional guidance and simpler tasks to maintain attention, aligning with Parra Ramírez et al. (2017). Despite these challenges, participants consistently perceived learning through games as enjoyable and effective, supporting by (Ridge, 2013) argue that storytelling fosters meaningful interaction.

Gamified storytelling emerged as an engaging learner-centered strategy that enhanced participation, interaction and communicative practice in vocabulary learning. Nonetheless, quantitative findings revealed no statistically significant improvement, or assessment misalignment may have constrained the measurable impact of the intervention.

Objective 1: which explored students' perceptions and attitudes toward vocabulary learning when engaged in gamified storytelling activities, results were positive. Despite some initial difficulties with the format, students showed interaction and participation, as reflected in Field Note 4, which documents students' descriptions of their characters' actions (Bhatti et al., 2022; Sucuzhañay Quintuña, 2022). As these authors argue, audiovisual media can stimulate engagement, a pattern also observed here, particularly when students favored simpler characters such as rogues and warriors. Overall, the objective was achieved, though results emphasize the importance of guided activities and closer monitoring during class.

Regarding Objective 2, which analyzed how gamification elements (missions, rewards, challenges) within storytelling influence students' motivation and participation in vocabulary learning, the objective was met. Learners responded favorably to the competitive and interactive dimensions of the game, with Test 2 showing stronger performance in items aligned with lesson content. This reinforces the value of thematic alignment in vocabulary learning. As Benjelloun and El Kirat El Allame (2023) note, audiovisual resources enhance retention, a claim supported here, as students engaged more actively with meaningful and appealing content. This was particularly evident during gameplay, as seen in Field Note 6 (lines 12–14), when students asked whether the game would continue, indicating sustained motivation.

Objective 3: The quantitative results of the needs analysis (84.5), the second test (94.8), and the final test (73.0) indicate that vocabulary acquisition showed an initial

improvement, followed by a decline toward the end of implementation. The increase between the first and second tests suggests that students benefited from the introduction of gamified storytelling, as they became familiar with the dynamics of the activities and demonstrated greater retention of new vocabulary. However, the decrease observed in the final test indicates that this progress was not sustained, possibly due to students' tendency to use previously known vocabulary, decreased attendance, limited presentation time, and the greater cognitive demands of the later sessions.

Although the main objective was partially achieved, the findings indicate that gamified storytelling positively influenced vocabulary acquisition by fostering short-term lexical improvement and demonstrating potential for long-term retention. These outcomes highlight the need for consistent implementation, ongoing assessment practices to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of this pedagogical approach within EFL contexts.

### **6.3 Implications**

The findings of this study highlight the opportunities and challenges of using gamified storytelling as a pedagogical tool for vocabulary acquisition in public school settings. Active participation and interaction with the game demonstrated that this approach supports vocabulary learning in a meaningful and interactive manner. These results align with theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of motivation, contextualized practice, and active participation in vocabulary retention and strengthening communication skills (Bhatti et al., 2022; Jiménez, 2019). For teachers, these findings highlight the value of integrating game-based narratives to encourage student engagement and provide authentic contexts for vocabulary use. However, mixed results reveal challenges such as difficulty following directions (Field Note 6), external interruptions, and disengagement among some

students due to non-academic cell phone use (Field Note 5, lines 8–10). External interruptions and disengagement among some students due to non-academic cell phone use (Field Note 5, lines 8–10) highlight the need to consider classroom management and student diversity. These challenges call for designing gamified activities that balance creativity and structure, include scaffolding, and strengthen motivation.

#### **6.4 Limitations and Perspectives**

A critical analysis of the findings indicates that, although gamified storytelling positively influenced engagement and vocabulary acquisition, several limitations constrained its effectiveness. External interruptions disrupted continuity, affecting concentration and activity flow, underscoring the need for protected instructional time and stronger classroom management. Additionally, the cognitive and linguistic demands exceeded some students' capacities, particularly those with lower proficiency or limited experience in interactive methodologies (Interview 1, lines 14–17). Future implementations should simplify mechanics, pre-teach vocabulary, and segment narratives to ensure inclusive participation. Variability in motivation also emerged, highlighting the need for differentiated strategies such as scaffolding, immediate feedback, and flexible grouping, as well as fostering digital literacy. Teacher training in gamification and cross-curricular projects linking storytelling with subjects like history or science are recommended to enhance relevance and engagement. Overall, the results depend on both pedagogical design and contextual factors—classroom conditions, institutional support, and students' prior experiences. At the meso level, collaboration with school administration is needed to secure resources, professional development, and family involvement. At the macro level, findings align with national innovation policies but reveal persistent inequalities, calling for improved classroom

conditions, flexible multimodal tasks, and longitudinal studies on learning sustainability and variables such as gender or gaming experience

### **6.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research on gamified storytelling should ensure that interventions provide clear and explicit instructions supported by visual aids or structured task cards, enabling students to follow the activities with greater autonomy. It is equally important to reduce classroom interruptions through better coordination with teachers, creating an environment that facilitates sustained engagement. Moreover, Aligning the activity with learners' age, proficiency level, and cognitive readiness is essential to address the mixed results observed and foster more consistent outcomes. Moreover, future research should test adaptive tools (e.g., spaced-repetition widgets) and measure delayed retention at 2–4 weeks. Adapting gamified storytelling to diverse learner profiles, while incorporating motivational strategies to sustain participation, will not only enhance vocabulary acquisition but also strengthen its potential as a pedagogical tool in public school contexts.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the effects of a gamified narrative approach on vocabulary learning. While engagement increased, vocabulary gains did not generalize across posttests, indicating a discrepancy between task complexity, proficiency levels, and classroom conditions. Nevertheless, narrative tasks with multimodal supports were effective when aligned with students' interests and abilities. Field notes showed higher engagement when students directly interacted with the game or the tasks were tailored to their cognitive levels, reinforcing theories that emphasize motivation, narrative, and meaningful practice in lexical retention and communicative competence (Bhatti et al., 2022; Jiménez, 2019). The use of audiovisual

and multimodal resources also improved vocabulary exposure, especially for visually and interactively oriented students.

Challenges such as interruptions, unclear instructions, and uneven motivation underscored the need for stronger classroom management and differentiated scaffolding. While some students excelled at creative and interactive tasks, others struggled with the narrative demands, highlighting the need to adapt gamified storytelling to students' age, proficiency level, and readiness to avoid overload and disengagement.

Institutional factors—such as limited educational continuity, limited experience with interactive methods, and uneven exposure to gamification—also influenced the results, revealing that the success of these approaches depends not only on the design but also on the sociocultural and institutional contexts. Addressing these factors is vital to ensuring accessibility and effectiveness in public education.

In conclusion, gamified storytelling shows great potential when supported by simplified mechanisms, explicit modeling, retrieval practice, and institutional support. While vocabulary gains were limited, the approach successfully fostered engagement, creativity, and participation, thus meeting the first two research objectives. Future longitudinal and comparative studies are recommended to assess sustainability and broader applicability. This research highlights gamified storytelling as a promising pedagogical strategy capable of combining innovation, inclusion, and meaningful language learning in public school contexts.

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**ANNEXES**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IrzXpdBuQXERzKKieVAyUGRZryP-5Hfy>