

GAME AND SONG INTEGRATION AS VOCABULARY LEARNING TOOLS FOR EFL STUDENTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Integrasi Game dan Lagu sebagai Alat Pembelajaran Kosakata bagi Siswa EFL (English as Foreign Language): Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis

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Abstract

Digital natives today are experiencing rapid cognitive changes, which have shifted their learning from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches. However, English remains a significant challenge in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) countries, which triggers students to develop their language skills. This study investigates the integration of songs and games in English vocabulary learning, using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. The present study identifies previous research that discusses the role of songs and games in English language learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. Relevant studies were then analyzed to understand the learning mechanisms employed and their effectiveness in supporting the English learning process for EFL students. This study resulted in 20 articles; however, not all describe the mechanisms of song-based games in detail, as they only mention possible approaches or strategies applied in English learning. Overall, the approach used in previous research is Multimodal Learning (MML), which incorporates visual, auditory, textual, and kinesthetic elements. This is supported by game elements such as rewards and punishments, points or scores, challenges, and feedback to enhance student engagement and vocabulary retention.

Keywords: English Vocabulary, Game, Game-based learning, Song

Abstrak

Generasi digital saat ini mengalami perubahan cara berpikir yang signifikan. Pola belajar pun bergeser dari yang dulu didominasi guru, kini lebih menekankan peran aktif siswa. Namun, bahasa Inggris tetap menjadi tantangan besar di negara-negara EFL (English as a Foreign Language), yang memicu siswa untuk mengembangkan kemampuan berbahasa mereka. Studi ini mengeksplorasi integrasi lagu dan permainan dalam pembelajaran kosakata Bahasa Inggris dengan menggunakan metode Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis (Systematic Literature Review). Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi riset-riset sebelumnya yang membahas peran lagu dan permainan dalam pembelajaran kosakata bahasa Inggris (vocabulary). Studi-studi yang relevan kemudian dianalisis untuk memahami mekanisme pembelajaran yang digunakan serta efektivitasnya dalam mendukung proses pembelajaran bahasa Inggris bagi siswa EFL. Studi ini menghasilkan 20 artikel, di mana tidak semua menjelaskan secara rinci mekanisme permainan berbasis lagu. Berdasarkan temuan, disimpulkan bahwa pendekatan yang umum digunakan adalah Multimodal Learning (MML), dengan menggabungkan elemen visual, auditori, tekstual, dan kinestetik. Lebih lanjut, cara pembelajaran ini diperkuat dengan elemen permainan seperti hadiah dan hukuman, poin atau skor, tantangan, serta umpan balik untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan dan retensi kosakata bahasa Inggris siswa.

Kata-kata kunci: Bahasa Inggris, Game-based learning, Lagu, Permainan

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, English remains a significant challenge in many developing countries, particularly within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts

where competition is increasingly intense. Implicitly, global competencies such as English proficiency are essential for expanding one's opportunities and building international connections. English plays a crucial role in both professional and academic settings (Neelambaram et al., 2024). Particularly for young learners who live in countries where English is a foreign language (EFL), early exposure is necessary to prepare children for comprehension and provide them with access to global education.

Amalia (2023) explains that elementary school students aged 7–12 are the most prominent generation to learn foreign languages early. Marinda (2020) further emphasizes that children at this age are in a concrete operational stage, where they can think logically and develop their memory substantially. Her study indicates this cohort is developing language abilities, particularly verbal language and concrete subjects. However, mastering the language requires competency in four fundamental skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Nuriani et al., as cited in Amalia, 2023). These skills cannot be fully developed without a strong foundation in other competencies, such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, which cannot be separated from language (Rohmatillah, 2017).

Vocabulary is one of the keys to English communication; without enough vocabulary, it will be difficult to understand others or express ideas (Dilago et al., 2022). Since there is an abundance of words to be used, teachers in school should create an innovative learning strategy suited to young learners to improve their English vocabulary skills (Permana, 2020). Based on several studies, integrating songs into vocabulary learning appears to be highly advisable. It is believed to be one of the powerful strategies (Wayan et al., 2020), making language learning and vocabulary retention more engaging for children. The function of rhyme, music, and lyrics in a song helps them quickly grasp and remember new words (Bertrand, 2024). Through an English song, learners are exposed to the English native language and become more familiar with pronunciation due to its repeated lyrics (Brooks, 1964), contributing to kids' memory absorption.

Elementary school students are classified as digital natives, so selecting a suitable learning medium is essential. As technology develops, teaching this cohort becomes challenging since their learning characteristics and behavior have shifted from traditional methods to a technology-based approach. They have been exposed to digital devices since birth, making them more familiar with cutting-edge devices such as computers and gadgets. This has affected the educational approaches that transformed learning into a more digitalized way, enabling the school lesson to be more student-centered (Juanda et al., as cited in Gusti et al., 2023). Young students are now more independent and more engaged in interactive learning due to the advancement of their cognitive abilities, where technologies inevitably affect their attention span. If the learning method is uninteresting, they might easily lose focus and divert their attention to something more interactive (Ningsih as cited in Gusti et al., 2023).

Incorporating technology or digital media into their learning process is essential, keeping their attention actively on the given lessons (Kristy et al., 2024). (Partovi & Razavi, 2019) said that educational game-based learning is one of the best approaches to engage with them. Further, he stated that students who played digital games in lessons played a better role in achieving educational goals than those who were trained traditionally. Games profoundly enhance student engagement by offering challenges, rewards, and playful animations, which lead to higher motivation (Zirawaga et al., 2017). This relates to the study conducted by Hong et al. (2024) that showed 43 peer-reviewed

articles published between 2013 and 2022 had been proven to satisfy students' needs and preferences by tailoring gamification and mechanics in education activities.

Based on the explanation above, this study wants to explore further the integration between game and song in vocabulary learning. This literature review aims to discover relevant prior studies that integrated both methods, the applied strategy, and their effectiveness in benefiting English vocabulary acquisition. To be concerned, this research aims to find any digital game approach that had been implemented back then in the past, and would be used as a reference to a preliminary study of designing a song-based game for vocabulary learning. Meanwhile, this study does limit the scope to digital only but also considers conventional ways implemented, as the current study explores all forms of song-based activities in English learning. All findings will be reviewed based on their relevance, approaches, and effectiveness in English vocabulary learning for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following are several theories that discuss the analytical methods used, as well as theories on English vocabulary, song-based approaches, and game-based learning, which serve as reference indicators for analysing the reviewed papers.

Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Following the guidelines for systematic literature reviews (SLR) outlined by Kitchenham & Charters (2007), an SLR is understood as a structured method for systematically locating, assess, and interpret all relevant research addressing a particular research question, subject area, or phenomenon. The studies that supply the data for an SLR are referred to as primary studies, whereas the review itself is categorised as a secondary study. Researchers typically conduct an SLR to consolidate existing findings on a treatment or technology, identify research gaps to inform future investigations, and establish a structured background for positioning new research within the current state of knowledge.

A fundamental characteristic of an SLR is its commitment to synthesising previous work in a methodical, transparent, and impartial manner. This involves implementing a predefined search strategy that can be evaluated for its thoroughness, ensuring the review's credibility and fairness. The goal is to uncover as many relevant primary studies as possible by using a systematic and unbiased search process. The meticulous nature of this search distinguishes an SLR from a conventional literature review, as it demands greater rigour and effort in its execution. In this study, this approach is employed to identify various technologies or instructional strategies used in teaching English vocabulary to young learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Vocabulary Learning

The study of vocabulary generally distinguishes between two principal strategies: the direct method and the indirect method (Syamsi, 1998). Direct vocabulary learning strategies focus on using tools such as dictionaries and word lists and involve an explicit tool in learning. On the other hand, indirect vocabulary learning does not emphasize word exposure but rather relies on individuals' interactions with their surrounding environment (Oxford & Crookall, 1990). Armbruster et al. (2001) mentioned that vocabulary acquisition methods differ; the indirect method refers to learning vocabulary when an individual hears and infers words through listening to others speak, hearing stories read aloud, or attempting to read and listen independently.

Although a great deal of vocabulary is learned indirectly, some vocabulary should be taught directly. Direct instruction helps students learn difficult words, such as those that represent complex concepts not part of the students' everyday experiences (Armbruster et al., 2001). The direct method involves explicit vocabulary instruction through individual word teaching and vocabulary learning strategies. The indirect method emphasizes learning vocabulary through context and exposure, whereas the direct method requires deliberate effort and memorization techniques and tools. (Sayekti, 2015).

Song-based approach

According to Cambridge English (2025), songs serve as a valuable and highly effective tool for vocabulary acquisition. The rhythmic structure and repetitive lyrics in a song can enhance memory retention and facilitate language learning. Cognitively, songs enable children to develop language automatically, knowing how to express thoughts and produce words in the language process (Paquette & Rieg, 2008). According to the British Council, Clarke (2023) suggests that songs are instrumental in enhancing memory, concentration, and physical coordination. Songs provide an effective entry point for integrating content related to skill development, language learning, and interdisciplinary studies. Moreover, the use of songs enables students to naturally acquire target language listening and pronunciation skills by mimicking the voice of native speakers, concurrently enriching their vocabulary and appreciating the musicality (Manurung & Yana, 2018).

Game-based learning

Game as a medium involves interactive activities, where its approaches make players feel involved in the game in achieving a certain mission with a reward or punishment (Liebermen, 2006). Game-based learning refers to the use of specific game principles and their application to real-life activities to engage users with a certain purpose, such as education (Trybus, as cited in Pho & Dinscore, 2015). The motivational psychology involved in game-based learning enables students to interact with educational material enjoyably and dynamically due to its mechanism of play.

Game-based learning is not only creating games for students to play but also designing learning activities that can gradually introduce concepts and guide users toward achieving final learning goals. In addition, Shaffer et al. (2005) argue that game-based learning is a type of game with predetermined learning outcomes embedded within the game. In line with this definition, Nordlinger et al. (2010) contend that the process of designing games for educational purposes should balance the scope of subject matter within the gameplay itself. Thus, students do not fully perceive the burden of learning when it is delivered through interactive play.

Based on the explanation above, it is indicated that both games and songs can be used in language learning approaches. This study aims to investigate the integration of songs and games into English vocabulary learning by examining existing literature and pedagogical practices. Specifically, it seeks to identify prior studies that have incorporated musical and gamified approaches in adigital formats. Furthermore, the current study explores the strategies employed within those interventions and assesses their effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts. By addressing these research questions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how culturally engaging tools can support language development in young EFL learners.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. SLR is a form of secondary study that utilizes a well-defined methodology to identify, analyze,

and interpret findings from previous research to answer predefined research questions. Many researchers have utilized SLR to identify and assess relevant literature systematically, addressing research questions by analyzing prior studies related to the topic of Auri Pramesti et al. (2022), where the guidelines were proposed by Kitchenham & Charters (2007). According to these guidelines, SLR consists of three main phases: planning, conducting, and reporting. To systematize the SLR process, this study follows the framework proposed in Figure 1, which illustrates the systematic phases employed in the current study.

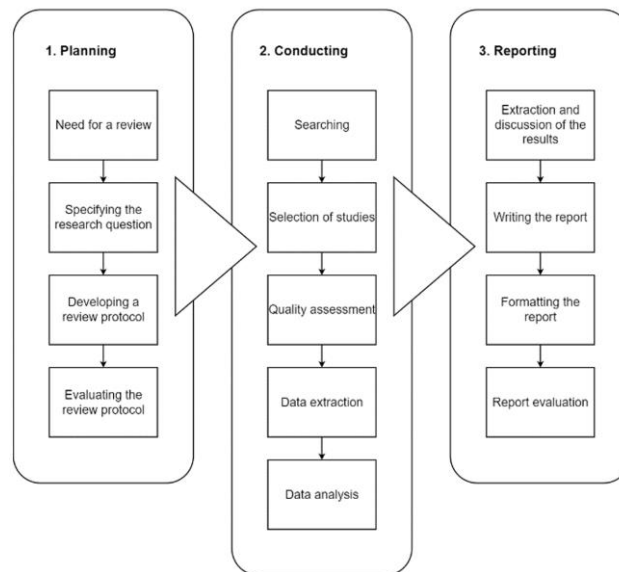


Figure 1. SLR Stages by Kitchenham and Charters (2007)
Source: Pramesti et.al. (2022)

Review Protocol

This study uses the PRISMA review protocol (Figure 2) to conduct a systematic search and extract relevant findings. This protocol is primarily applied during the Conducting phase of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) process. PRISMA is utilized as a guide for the author to reduce data and screen the literature through the following steps: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The inclusion stage is limited to qualitative synthesis, where the collected literature is analyzed descriptively without proceeding to the last stage (meta-analysis). An overview of these stages is presented in Figure 2, which outlines the number of records identified, included, and excluded, along with the reasons for exclusion based on the research criteria.

Table 1. Research Criteria

Criteria	Descriptions
Inclusion	- Articles published within the last 10 years (2014–2024) - Research involves English learning strategies using songs and/or games. - Reliable and peer-reviewed papers - Open Access
Exclusion	- Studies without an English learning context - Other publications, such as posters, books, and infographics - inaccessible/unreadable full-text articles

Search Strategies

The article search process utilizes the *Boolean* search system, which is useful in narrowing down the most relevant articles and refining the specific data for this research. According to Rush Library (2025), researchers can filter data using *Boolean* operators and sort documents by type, time frame, subject, or publisher. Thus, this study uses three primary keywords: Game, Song, and English Vocabulary, which are then expanded using a variety of relevant terms. The final full prompt implemented on the search engine is ("Game" OR "Game-based learning" OR "Gamification") AND ("Song" OR "Music" OR "Lyrics") AND ("English" OR "Language" OR "Vocabulary").

Moreover, additional filters such as sorting by year, open access availability, and subject areas were applied to refine the search results. This approach narrows down the findings according to the criteria listed in Table 1 and also serves as a limitation to prevent overlapping data. By applying these filters, the study can concentrate on the most recent findings and developments in learning strategies incorporating songs and games for young learners within the last 10 years. On the one hand, an open-access filter was selected due to the researcher's limited cost of purchasing full-text paid articles, disallowing for in-depth reading during the analysis phase.

Selection

The selection process is conducted across two major scientific data publishers, Scopus and Science Direct. Both were chosen due to their wide research coverage and inclusion of multinational contributions. The selection criteria include research articles, theses, and conference proceedings (Baas et al., 2020). Meanwhile, other scholarly outputs such as books, posters, and infographics are excluded as it does not delve deeper into the evaluation of applied strategy or approaches. Selected findings were then systematically analysed based on three primary objectives (game, song, and English learning), where selected studies proceeded only if they mentioned songs and/or games within the context of language learning.

Quality Assessment

The quality assessment is established based on all the criteria outlined in Table 1, which was referred to as Pramesti et al. (2022). Only peer-reviewed articles were selected to ensure the credibility and validity of the sources. A 10-year publication range is chosen because it ensures relevance and recency of learning methods (Syuhra et al., 2025), expanding more to practical approaches in previous years, and the applicability to the EFL young learners. These criteria refine the data to align with research objectives, ensuring the most relevant findings while also reducing overlapping information.

Data Analysis Procedure

The procedural analysis in this research was developed based on the study by Khaldi et al. (2023) with several objectives adapted to suit the context of this study. First, an extensive collection of papers was gathered based on the research criteria. The findings were then screened using relevant terms from the abstracts, focusing on three main keywords: song, game, and English vocabulary. Subsequently, this study identified the types of song- and game-based approaches applied in previous research, as well as their

relevance and effectiveness, which were then sorted in a table. From this initial pool (Table 2), the relevant articles were selected and are further explained in the discussion section.

DISCUSSION

This section describes how the data was extracted from the initial database (illustrated in Figure 2). The data was then analyzed descriptively within three different aspects (Table 2). Finally, the findings were presented in a report, supported by diagrams for further descriptive evaluation.

Data Extraction

PRISMA Flow Diagram (Moher et al., 2009) is utilized for article selection, as detailed in the Review Protocol. Since the study focused on extracting data regarding the relevance, strategy, and effectiveness of integrating games and songs into language learning, but did not proceed further with meta-analysis. The selection process involved screening articles based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria (p.6), ensuring precise data extraction. Titles were first filtered to align with the research focus, followed by an abstract screening to assess whether game and song approaches were included and how their strategies were applied to English language learning. Finally, eligible studies underwent an in-depth reading and analysis.

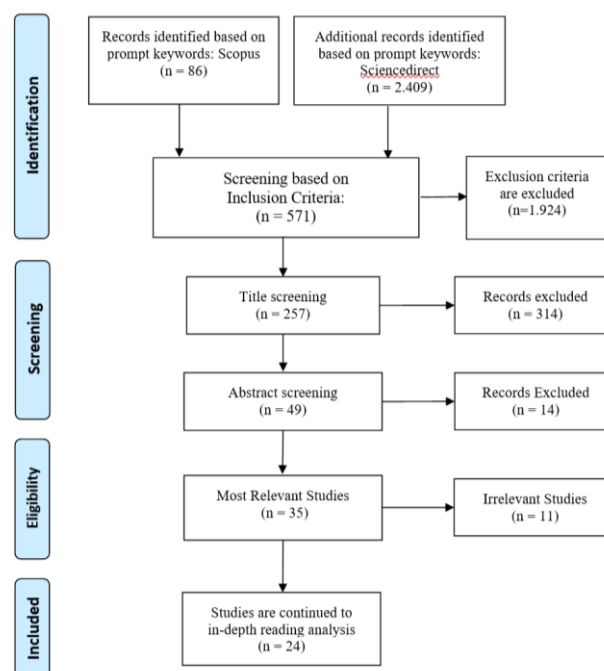


Figure 2. Selection Process

Data Analysis

The data findings are analyzed descriptively, referring to the procedural resemblance to Khaldi et al. (2023). Out of the 24 selected articles, four findings could not be accessed due to open-access issues or payment restrictions associated with certain journals; thus, only 20 remain accessible articles for perusal. The following table summarizes the selected studies, strategies employed, and their corresponding outcomes.

Table 2. Data Analysis

Paper	Applied Strategy	Effectiveness
Melody touch: A game for learning English from songs (Kitichaiwat et al., 2014)	Melody Touch was an Android game utilizing multimodal interaction. Players earned coins by correctly identifying song lyrics containing homophones or synonyms, which can be used to unlock content. Combo points were accumulated through correct selections until a mistake or time expiry. The game features character customization, level selection, and a leaderboard system are available to enhance engagement and competition.	Although the game remained underdeveloped, the tested participant found it intuitive and easy to navigate. However, its development was hindered by time constraints and incomplete implementation.
Assessing English vocabulary and enhancing young English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation through games, songs, and stories (Chou, 2014)	This study developed a field note activity integrating songs and games sequentially for vocabulary learning. Monopoly involved reading and spelling words aloud on a game board, while Twister and Crossword reinforced spelling and recognition through lettered mats and paired puzzles. The song approach engaged students in listening, singing, and rhythmic movement.	Older children (Grades 4–5) benefited from spelling and reading comprehension, while younger ones (Grades 2–3) preferred rich visual and auditory input.
Personalized versus Normal Practice of L2 Speaking on Iranian EFL Learners' Oral Proficiency (Rahmani, 2015)	Not specified*	Integrating game-based activities and rhythmic songs in class was proven to boost Iranian oral proficiency.
Technology Enhanced Instruction: An Example of English Language Learning in the Context of Peace (Sasi et al., 2017)	This study developed an educational assessment app using Microsoft Visual Studio, resulting in a DVD-based system. The app presented challenges featuring words, songs, videos, and short films about peace in English. The game master could arrange questions or let the evaluation engine determine the order. Audio played every five seconds until a choice was made, with happy or sad face indicators for correct and incorrect answers.	Participants favored technology-enhanced learning, though some images were confusing. The study recommends animated visuals for better comprehension.
Student attitudes to games-based skills development: Learning from video games in higher education (Barr, 2018)	Not specified*	In-game challenges and multiplayer modes enhance students' communication and teamwork skills.
The Value of Song Lyrics for Teaching and Learning English Phrasal Verbs: A Corpus Investigation of Four Music Genres (Akbari et al., 2018)	Not specified*	Over half of the phrasal verbs in music lyrics were pedagogically useful. Pop music provided more exposure, while hip-hop provided less, but posed challenges due to slang and cultural nuances.

Development of a Listening Comprehension Model by Using YouTube for English Students (Ismail et al., 2019)	Not specified*	The LCSMB Model was effectively supported online English listening instruction through a task-based approach, fostering interaction, activity, and flexible learning.
Preschool Education Students' Attitudes About the Possible Impact of Music On Children's Speech Development (Blaženka, 2019)	This mechanism adopted a multimodal learning approach by incorporating musical and creative musical activities. It uses various songs, counting rhymes, and singing games, where participants engage in activities such as sung speech, asking musical questions, completing unfinished musical phrases, and setting texts to music.	The study found that verbal elements and multimodal activities greatly enhance children's speech development, highlighting their increased use in education.
Exploring language learning motivation among primary EFL learners (Wallace & Leong, 2020)	Not specified*	Singing a song in class and integrating games within the subject reduced a feeling of intimidation and shifted focus from score-oriented learning.
Immersing Japanese Students into English Language Learning: Songs, Games, and Cultures (Syafryadin & Boulahnane, 2021)	The mechanism engaged students in English through games like hide-and-seek, musical chairs, and word guessing, introducing vocabulary for greetings and self-introductions. Singing sessions reinforced learning as teachers guided students to follow and repeat lyrics from songs such as <i>Morning Bells</i> and <i>Clap Hands</i> .	Students struggled with grammar, pronunciation, anxiety, and vocabulary retention, while teachers faced challenges in managing chaos and disengagement.
Music as a Medium of Instruction (MMI): A new pedagogical approach to English language teaching for students with and without music training (Pineda & Waddell, 2024)	The MMI employed three music-based strategies: modifying children's rhyme lyrics, using pitch sequences, and applying rhythmic patterns. Meta-centered activities focused on individual or group goals, with rewards enhancing player commitment. Progression was driven by a scoreboard, reinforcing gamification through ludic and motivational elements.	The study suggests that MMI may outperform gamification in improving language skills, especially in music listening. English teachers were encouraged to integrate MMI or gamification into their practice.
"Lass Frooby Noo!" The Interference of Song Lyrics and Meaning on Speech Intelligibility (Brouwer et al., 2022)	Not specified*	Participants performed best with instrumental versions, while English or Simlish versions (fictional language from The Sims game) were more disrupted.
Challenges & Strategies Used by English Teachers in Teaching English Language Skills to Young Learners (Oktavia et al., 2022)	Not Specified*	This finding emphasizes the importance of media-based strategies (using games and songs) in increasing students' interest in English lessons.
English for Young Learning Method through Games and Songs for Elementary School (Octaberlina, 2023)	The study applied seven techniques: Listen & Repeat for song phrase imitation, Listen & Act for movement-based learning, Q&A for dialogue	The study found that the seven types of learning techniques were interpreted to improve

	practice, Substitute for image-based guessing, See the Difference for object comparison, Concept Mapping for creative presentations, and Song & Games for interactive singing with gestures.	learners' language skills. It also recommends further research into newer methods that are more appealing.
On the relationship between mobile-based extramural activities & vocabulary development of EFL learners: a mixed-method study (Ebadi et al., 2023)	Not specified*	Using mobile tools for extramural English (EE) activities enhances vocabulary. The game fosters collaboration, while the song offers flexible learning opportunities.
Elements of digital media in vocabulary and remote-learning achievement (Pinem & Rahmawan, 2023)	This study examined three digital media for vocabulary learning: <i>Little Shop of Treasures</i> for object-word matching, song-based techniques for word-sound recognition and dictionary use, and movie-based strategies for pronunciation mimicry.	Shared media in games, songs, and movies aids vocabulary learning. Students favor easily accessible songs with catchy rhythms, melodies, and meaningful lyrics for better retention.
The role of individual differences in L2 vocabulary learning: A review of out-of-class exposure, strategic learning, and motivation (Albalawi, 2024)	This study explored five vocabulary learning approaches: extensive reading, TV viewing, song listening, video games, and social media. It examined <i>Playing History</i> , a game with rich language input in historical settings, using 60 target words with varying frequencies. Additionally, an experiment divided students into three groups to assess vocabulary retention through repeated song exposure.	This review suggests that out-of-class exposure, like games and songs, boosts vocabulary learning. It is proven that English vocabulary that occurs more frequently, either in Songs or Games, is likely to be acquired quickly. The higher the frequency of listening to songs or playing games, the higher the vocabulary gained.
Exploring Language Learning Strategies of TESL Practicum Students Through a Phenomenological Lens for Enhancing Language Competency (Khamis et al., 2024)	Not specified*	Gamified learning was effective as the students share their knowledge with friends and family. Meanwhile, listening to music reduces anxiety and enhances self-confidence.
Language learning through music on the academic achievement, creative thinking, and self-esteem of the English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. (Chen et al., 2024)	This research utilizes the TELLTM quantitative experimental design, integrating multimodal learning through songwriting, lyric composition, and collaborative music-making.	TELLTMs like singing, creating, and performing to help students acquire vocabulary. This fosters their divergent thinking, problem-solving skills, and creative approaches to language learning.
Non-English Major Teachers' Experiences of Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL): A Phenomenological Study	The study employed a phenomenological approach to analyze strategies by non-English major teachers. T1 used Charades with picture cards for word guessing, T2 and T4 incorporated thematic songs on colors, numbers, and	The study found that applied strategies fostered a positive classroom environment, leading to sustained and engaging English language learning.

(Romadhon et al., 2024)	animals, followed by vocabulary games, while T3 applied narrative storytelling with embedded English vocabulary.	However, pedagogical effectiveness lacked formal assessment, prompting a call for further research on long-term impact.
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** Data about game-based learning strategy was not available or was not discussed further.*

Report

The research findings are organized into three categories based on the previously stated research questions, which include:

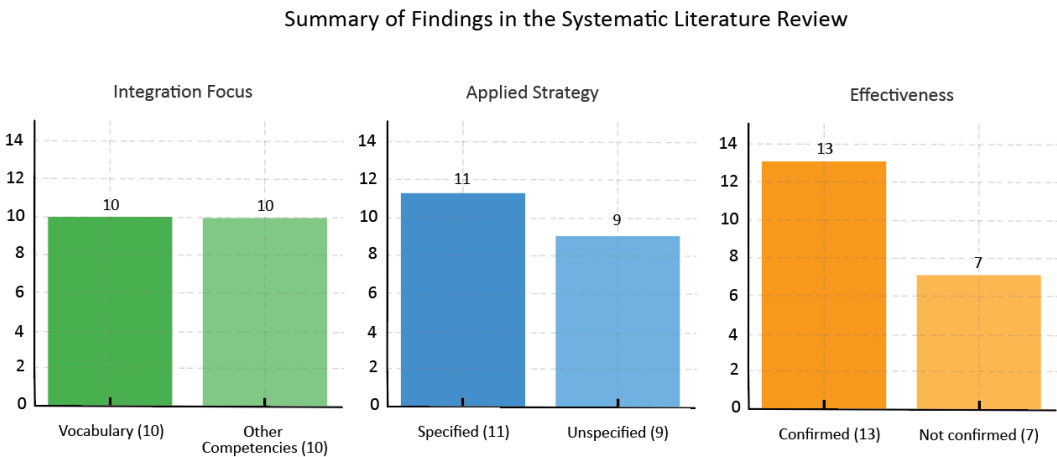


Figure 3. Analysis Results

Integration Focus (Relevancy)

Among 20 articles, ten identified integrated topics that discuss songs and games specifically used for English vocabulary learning (Figure 3). Most findings used this approach for EFL learners, particularly the young ones (Akbar et al., 2018; Albalawi, 2024; Chou, 2014; Ebadi et al., 2023; Kitichaiwat, 2014; Octaberlina, 2023; Pinem & Rahmawan, 2023; Romadhon et al., 2024; Sasi et al., 2017; Syafryadin & Boulahnane, 2021). In contrast, the remaining studies examined the use of both for other English learning competencies (Figure 3), including speaking, listening, pronunciation, and speech intelligibility. On the one hand, some also discuss the effect on student motivation (Barr, 2018; Blaženka, 2019; Brouwer et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2019; Khamis et al., 2024; Oktavia et al., 2022; Pineda & Waddell, 2024; Rahmani, 2015; Wallace & Leong, 2020).

Learning Approaches (Applied Strategy)

Not all studies explicitly described a detailed mechanism using songs and games in English vocabulary learning. Almost half of these papers only demonstrated research findings regarding the benefits of either one or both in the learning process without explicitly referring to information about learning approaches (Figure 3). The advantages of both include boosting proficiency, reducing anxiety, offering pedagogical value, enabling flexible application, enhancing student engagement, and being more preferable due to their interactivity (Akbar et al., 2018; Brouwer et al., 2022; Ebadi et al., 2023;

Khamis et al., 2024; Oktavia et al., 2022; Rahmani, 2015; Wallace & Leong, 2020).

On the other hand, some studies mentioned that game mechanics were applied in a variety of approaches (Table 2). Some included gamification, multimodal learning, interactive quizzes, visual & auditory, physical games, and song-based techniques. These techniques were implemented with the aid of flashcards, music from a speaker, video animation, and gadgets (computers or smartphones). Mostly, these involved gamification elements such as rewards and punishments, customized profiles, leaderboards, points, progressions, challenges, and feedback support to enhance engagement and retention in young learners (Albalawi, 2024; Blaženka, 2019; Chen et al., 2024; Chou, 2014; Kitichaiwat, 2014; Octaberlina, 2023; Pineda & Waddell, 2024; Pinem & Rahmawan, 2023; Rahmani, 2015; Romadhon et al., 2024; Sasi et al., 2017; Syafryadin & Boulahnane, 2021).

Effectiveness

The effectiveness analysis was conducted by investigating the experimental evaluation results from all studies involving respondents who were mostly EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. This aspect was explored in the final part of the paper, where the research validation was analyzed. Overall, all of the reviewed studies showed positive outcomes in language learning through the use of games and songs (Figure 3). However, not all studies provided evaluation results due to several factors, such as an underdeveloped condition, time constraints, a limited research focus on reviewing prior studies, or simply making a comparison study (Table 2) (Akbari et al., 2018; Brouwer et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2019; Kitichaiwat, 2014; Pineda & Waddell, 2024; Romadhon et al., 2024; Sasi et al., 2017). In addition, the rest of the studies confirmed that the integration of both song and games contributes to English language improvement.

Evaluation

Based on the analysis of Table 2 (see Page 8), it is found that almost all studies employed Multimodal Learning (MML) where instructional elements were presented in more than one sensory mode (visual, auditory, textual, and kinesthetic) (Sankey et al., as cited in). Another finding is that some media incorporate digital game-based learning in the learning process, while others do not. Studies that integrated this applied technology, such as Kitichaiwat (2014), designed a digital game app that extracts subtitles and timing from audio content using SubRip. This study explored how the lyric guessing game is implemented through an Android software made for children.

Furthermore, Sasi et al. (2017) had an interactive DVD application that was designed to support English learning through song and picture within the framework of peace-related contexts. The paper explained how children grasp information easily from pictures and songs, contributing to a broader vocabulary. Moreover, Ismail et al. (2019) developed a Listening Comprehension Model Based on Media (LSCMB), a web-based application where learners engage with the lessons via interactive instructions using images, videos, and audio elements to make listening activities more enjoyable and relatable.

This modern approach aligns with Romadhon et al. (2024) and Chen et al. (2024), who also implemented audio-visual resources, although their methods relied on free internet-based content such as songs and voice instructions from YouTube. Other

researchers also explored the use of commercial video games such as *Minecraft*, *Portal 2*, and *Little Shop of Treasures* to enhance English learning (Albalawi, 2024; Barr, 2018; Ebadi et al., 2023; Pinem & Rahmawan, 2023). The multiplayer feature and live voice chat during gameplay effectively encouraged players to communicate actively in English, forcing them to communicate and coordinate. This provides learners with live interaction, especially with overseas players, as it compels them to use English as a means of communication (Barr, 2018).

On the other hand, some studies were not digitized, instead solely focusing on face-to-face instruction (conventional way). Chou (2014), Rahmani (2015), and Blaženka (2019) engaged learners in multisensory activities such as storytelling, board games, and singing along with teachers. In these implementations, songs were often combined with body movements or dancing (physical activity). Here, the students listened and responded to their instructor's directions regarding which body part was being touched or moved, and those who failed would get a light punishment. This technique was also used by Syafryadin & Boulahnane (2021) in the International Work Camp, a 10-day immersive event where students participated in daily English activities. This event conducted cooking presentation, hide-and-seek game, and sing-along, where vocabularies were inserted in the activity for students to memorize. Similarly, Octaberlina (2023) applied the same activity-based approach by using concept-mapping games, where children were encouraged to design and present projects to their peers based on a concept they drew on paper.

When it comes to digitalized play, some applied vocabulary guessing where students must fill in the blank lyrics based on words they heard in the song. This was used by Kitichaiwat (2014), where a user has to select one of the given words to fill in a blank displayed; given words have the same sound (homophones) or the same meaning (synonyms). Another good approach called MMI (Music as a Medium of Instruction), participants were taught using three music-based strategies: variations of children's rhymes, pitch sequences, and rhythmic sequences (Pineda & Waddell, 2024). Children's rhymes help introduce new vocabulary by pairing words with familiar melodies, making learning more natural and engaging. Pitch sequences support concepts like telling time by guiding students to use different intonations. Meanwhile, rhythmic patterns teach stress and intonation by linking musical beats with the natural rhythm of spoken language. This study further highlights that the frequency of listening might affect the way learners retain information, as providing learners with a constant vocabulary exposure led them to have longer memory retention (Albalawi, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The present study yields 20 relevant articles that discuss the integration of song and game in one study. However, some did not provide a comprehensive discussion of the strategies or pedagogical approaches underlying song-based games for students. Instead, primarily focused on empirical findings on the contributions of songs or games to English learning, without explicitly detailing the instructional methods implemented. Ten out of the 20 articles were found relevant because they discussed of song-based games in the implementation. Meanwhile, in the applied strategy, only 11 papers discussed the integrated songs and games approach in language learning, showing that its counterparts

are unspecified. In addition, the findings on effectiveness indicated that more than half of the studies demonstrated improved learner performance, while others did not provide conclusive results due to various factors such as time constraints, a limited research focus, or simply making a comparison.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that a wide range of applied strategies have been employed in previous studies to enhance vocabulary acquisition in language learning, with a strong emphasis on Multimodal Learning (MML). This approach, which integrates visual, auditory, textual, and kinesthetic modalities, appears to be a dominant and effective framework across both digital and non-digital settings. Many studies used digital game-based learning by including interactive apps, lyric-guessing games, online platforms, and commercial video games to make learning more engaging and encourage real-time communication among learners. Thus, this review offers a foundational reference for the future development of English learning media that integrate songs and games. Particularly, if the media is incorporated with technology, which is more preferable for EFL young pupils, allowing them to independently manage their learning.

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