Teamwork Makes Dream Work: Exploring the Impact of TGT on EFL Vocabulary Learning

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ABSTRACT
This chapter reports a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on the implementation of the Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Following the PRISMA framework, 35 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 were systematically identified, screened, and synthesized across varied educational levels and contexts. The review explores three key areas: (1) TGT's effectiveness in improving vocabulary mastery; (2) its role in fostering learner motivation and engagement; and (3) challenges in implementation. Findings indicate that the Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT) effectively combines structured teamwork with competitive academic games, promoting active participation, peer interaction, and long-term vocabulary retention. Additional benefits include increased learner confidence and classroom involvement. However, recurring challenges such as uneven participation, time limitations, classroom management difficulties, and competition fatigue were noted. Suggested strategies include balanced role distribution, supportive media integration, and real-life vocabulary contextualization. By consolidating recent empirical evidence, this chapter provides theoretical insights and practical guidance for educators and researchers interested in adopting the Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT)

as an engaging and effective approach to vocabulary instruction in EFL contexts.

Keywords: cooperative learning, EFL vocabulary acquisition, learner-centered instruction, systematic review, Teams-Games-Tournament

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning is a pedagogical framework that promotes structured collaboration to achieve shared academic goals while ensuring individual accountability (Slavin, 1995). It is based on positive interdependence, where success relies on each member's contribution, and personal accountability, which secures responsibility for learning. In language education, cooperative learning encourages meaningful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and peer scaffolding, aligning with Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory on the role of social engagement in cognitive development. Techniques such as Jigsaw, Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD), and TGT provide cognitive and affective benefits. It is associated with improved vocabulary mastery, learner engagement, and positive classroom dynamics in EFL contexts. Aidarahma et al., (2022) found that flashcards combined with TGT improved vocabulary mastery and participation, while Kamal et al., (2022) gains in vocabulary retention and enthusiasm were reported through cooperative, game-based activities. Dewi & Nasution (2024) observed that cooperative structures in vocabulary instruction fostered sustained attention and collaborative problem-solving among tertiary-level EFL students. These findings highlight cooperative learning as a strong foundation for integrating game-based approaches like TGT into language instruction.

EFL vocabulary acquisition is a key component of language proficiency and second language acquisition, supporting communicative competence in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nation, 2001; Zhang, 2023). In EFL settings, minimal exposure to authentic language beyond the classroom often limits vocabulary learning. Although rote memorization and drills can aid short-term recall, they rarely

ensure lasting retention or motivation (Craik & Lockhart, 1972; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Therefore, researchers recommend interactive, contextualized, learner-centered methods that promote active lexical use. Studies show that collaborative and game-based strategies enhance retention and engagement: Rihanah & Sudiyono (2020) found that TGT improved vocabulary mastery and oral communication confidence; Karman & Indriani (2021) reported better vocabulary recall among junior high students via cooperative learning; and Nahak (2023) observed that TGT-based lessons fostered negotiation of meaning and contextual vocabulary application. In Indonesia, where large class sizes, mixed abilities, and exam-focused curricula pose challenges, TGT addresses these issues by combining repeated vocabulary exposure with collaborative tasks and competitive games, offering contextualized practice and immediate feedback. Aidarahma et al., (2022) recorded measurable vocabulary gains, while Dewi & Nasution (2024) and Kamal et al., (2022) reported increased motivation and engagement. Usman et al., (2020) and Adhaniyah (2024) found that TGT sustained attention and active participation across educational levels, highlighting its adaptability under the Curriculum Merdeka framework.

Learner-centered instruction positions students as active contributors to learning, responsible for their progress, while the teacher serves as a facilitator (Weimer, 2002). Grounded in constructivist principles, it holds that knowledge develops through active experience and interaction, not passive reception. In EFL contexts, it supports authentic communication, collaborative problem-solving, and personalized tasks that enhance motivation and retention. Vocabulary instruction enables learners to use language meaningfully, apply new lexical items in context, and reflect on learning strategies. Evidence shows its effectiveness: Wibowo (2024) learner-centered, TGT-based activities improved motivation and vocabulary mastery; Frayoga (2024) greater autonomy in TGT sessions promoted active participation and linguistic risk-taking; and Wulandari et al., (2021) student-centered TGT improved collaboration and language gains. These findings indicate that embedding learner-centered practices in cooperative, game-based frameworks like TGT can

optimize cognitive and affective outcomes.

Systematic review is a research methodology that identifies, evaluates, and synthesizes empirical evidence for specific research questions (Gough et al., 2017). Unlike narrative reviews, which may be subjective due to selective inclusion, systematic reviews use transparent, standardized procedures to reduce bias and ensure comprehensive coverage. In education, they consolidate findings across contexts and study designs, strengthening the evidence base for policy and practice. In EFL vocabulary learning, they analyze cumulative impacts of instructional strategies such as TGT by integrating results from multiple studies. This reveals consistent effectiveness patterns and contextual variables, including educational level, learner demographics, and instructional settings. Guided by PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009), this chapter applies a systematic literature review (SLR) of 35 empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025. Synthesizing findings from Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Ecuador, and other countries provides an evidence-based evaluation of TGT's cognitive, affective, and practical implications for EFL vocabulary instruction.

TGT is a cooperative learning model developed by Slavin (1995) that combines structured teamwork, academic games, and competitive tournaments to enhance achievement and social interaction. Students work in heterogeneous teams, play educational games, and compete in tournaments where individual scores add to the team total. Grounded in Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory and gamification principles (Prensky, 2001), TGT promotes active engagement, peer scaffolding, and intrinsic motivation. EFL vocabulary instruction provides repeated exposure to lexical items in interactive contexts, improving retention and practical use. Empirical studies confirm its effectiveness: Rihanah & Sudiyono (2020) reported increased enthusiasm and cooperation; Aidarahma et al., (2022) and Kamal et al. (2022) found notable gains in vocabulary mastery and participation; Dewi & Nasution (2024) observed better retention and comprehension. Across levels and countries, findings indicate that TGT bridges cognitive and affective learning, making it a strong approach for EFL vocabulary development.

Despite growing research on TGT, gaps remain in its application to EFL vocabulary learning. Dewi & Nasution (2024), Rihanah & Sudiyono (2020), Aidarahma et al., (2022), and Kamal et al., (2022) confirm its effectiveness in improving vocabulary mastery, yet most studies focus on Indonesian classrooms. This raises questions about adaptability to diverse cultural and institutional contexts with varying learner profiles, curricula, and resources. Many use short interventions, often one or two action research cycles or brief quasi-experiments, which limit evaluation of long-term vocabulary retention or transfer beyond the classroom. While affective gains such as motivation and engagement are reported, few examine how TGT achieves these outcomes through mechanisms like peer support, competition dynamics, or game design. These gaps indicate the need for comprehensive studies integrating cognitive, affective, and contextual dimensions of TGT implementation.

This chapter synthesizes and critically examines empirical research on the TGT model for enhancing vocabulary mastery in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Drawing on 35 empirical studies (2020–2025) across diverse educational levels, regions, and methods, it evaluates TGT's pedagogical value by analyzing effectiveness, affective outcomes, and contextual factors. The aim is to offer evidence-based insights to guide practice, strengthen cooperative learning in the Merdeka Curriculum, and advance scholarly discourse on gamification in language education. The chapter is structured into four parts: **Methods** describes the systematic literature review (SLR) process, including search strategy, selection criteria, and quality assessment; **Results** summarize study contexts, participants, methods, and findings; **Discussion** interprets results by cognitive impact, affective impact, contextual fit, and implementation challenges; and **Conclusion and Recommendations** synthesize insights, highlight pedagogical implications, and suggest future research directions on TGT in EFL vocabulary learning.

METHODS

This book chapter employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, which systematically identifies, evaluates, and synthesizes empirical studies to address predetermined research questions. A systematic literature review allows researchers to map out existing findings and trends within a focused area of inquiry using transparent and replicable procedures (Gough, 2020). This chapter used the SLR method to examine how TGT fosters vocabulary development in EFL learning environments. The review process complied with the PRISMA statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) introduced by Moher et al. (2009) to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive process.

The SLR procedure in this study consisted of three primary stages: planning, conducting, and reporting.

a. Planning

At the planning stage, the objectives of the review were translated into specific research questions to guide the article selection and analysis:

RQ1: How effective is the TGT method in enhancing vocabulary mastery among EFL learners?

RQ2: How does TGT impact learner motivation and engagement in vocabulary learning?

RQ3: What challenges and limitations are reported in implementing TGT for vocabulary instruction in EFL classrooms?

These questions were formulated using the PICo framework (Population, Intervention, Context), which is suitable for research synthesizing findings across various study designs and learner levels.

b. Conducting

This phase involved searching, identifying, selecting, and extracting data from scholarly sources. The primary materials for this review consisted of peer-reviewed journal publications and conference papers accessible in open-access form, focusing on studies published between 2020 and 2025. The search used several academic databases and repositories, including *Google*

Scholar, ERIC, DOAJ, and *ResearchGate*. Reference management software such as *Mendeley* was used to manage and organize the retrieved studies, while *Microsoft Excel* was employed for initial data tabulation and screening. The following keywords were used: *"Teams Games Tournament," "TGT vocabulary learning," "EFL cooperative learning," "game-based vocabulary instruction,"* and *"TGT in English classrooms."*

Three quality assessment criteria (**QA**) were applied to filter relevant articles:

QA1: Articles published in the 5 years between 2020 and 2025 in English.

QA2: Studies focused on EFL learners at the elementary, secondary, or tertiary education levels.

QA3: Studies that examined the implementation of TGT for English learning.

Initially, more than 60 studies were retrieved. After screening based on **QA** criteria, 35 articles were selected for inclusion.

c. Reporting

In the reporting stage, the findings from the 35 selected studies were systematically organized to ensure clarity and coherence in synthesis. The results were first summarized in ***Table 1***: Research Focus**,** which categorizes the literature into four interrelated thematic areas**:**

Cognitive Impact: Measurable gains in vocabulary mastery and academic performance, with improved comprehension and retention through TGT.

Affective Impact: Higher learner motivation, engagement, and interest, with competitive games creating an enjoyable classroom atmosphere.

Contextual Fit: TGT's adaptability across levels, subjects, and learning contexts aligns well with the Merdeka Curriculum.

Implementation Challenges: Obstacles include uneven participation, time limits, need for teacher training, and sustaining focus over time to approach ensures that the review presents both a concise reference tool, ***Table 1,*** and a structured discussion of **cognitive, affective, contextual,** and **implementation aspects**, offering a holistic perspective on the

utilization of TGT in EFL vocabulary instruction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A total of 68 studies were initially retrieved using the selected keywords across multiple databases. After applying the quality assessment criteria, 35 empirical articles were chosen for complete analysis. The 33 remaining articles were excluded for the following reasons:

- 33 articles did not meet **QA1** (published before 2020 or incomplete full-text access)
- From those 33 articles, 15 studies did not satisfy **QA2** (not at the appropriate educational level)
- From those 33 articles, 11 studies failed **QA3** (did not use the TGT learning method)

The 35 eligible studies were then evaluated and categorized in terms of geographical context, research design, educational level, and instructional outcomes. Most studies were implemented in Indonesia, followed by the United States, Pakistan, Taiwan, Turkey, India, and Ecuador. Most research employed classroom action research (CAR) and quasi-experimental designs.

Studies found notable improvements in vocabulary mastery through TGT, often accompanied by increased participation and motivation. Positive effects were amplified when paired with media such as flashcards, digital games, or storytelling. Reported limitations included procedural inconsistencies, brief interventions, lack of control groups, student fatigue, and uneven team involvement.

To enhance clarity and accessibility, the following table provides a synthesis of the review results:

Table 1 Research Focus

No.	**Researcher(s)**	**Research Focus**
1.	Adhaniya (2024); Aidarahma et al., (2022); Dewi & Nasution (2024); Kamal et al., (2022);	Examines the effectiveness of the TGT method in enhancing vocabulary mastery at various educational levels, often accompanied by increases in

	Karman & Indriani (2021) Nahak (2023); Rihanah & Sudiyono (2020); Usman et al., (2020)	student motivation, engagement, and participation.
2.	Abriyanto et al., (2022); Fath et al., 2021; Frayoga (2024); Herningtyasari & Himawati (2022); Matitaputty et al., (2023); Oktarianto & Handayanto (2021); Patil et al., (2023); Ramadillah & Yatri, (2024); A. L. Saputri & Sukmawati (2024); Wibowo (2024); Wulandari et al., (2021)	Implements the TGT to increase learning achievements or academic achievement (not limited to vocabulary), including in science, social studies, and thematic subjects; focuses on student engagement, collaboration, and motivation.
3.	Afifah & Priyana (2024); Anchundia & Cedeño (2025); Chan & Lo (2024); Imron et al., (2024); Luzardo et al., (2024); Shahid et al., (2024); Tsai (2024); Yazid et al., (2024); X. Zhang (2023); Zhou & Wei (2024)	Investigates gamification in English language learning (including TGT-like methods), focusing on increasing motivation, engagement, collaboration, reducing anxiety, and addressing implementation challenges in various educational contexts.
4.	Baydar (2020)	Explores pre-service teachers' perceptions of TGT, noting benefits (confidence, teamwork, motivation) and challenges (noise, classroom management, class size).
5.	Sugiyati & Indriani (2022)	Applies TGT in online learning to improve grammar understanding and student

		engagement.
6.	Saputri et al., (2023)	Uses TGT with domino card media with the aim of increasing interest in Indonesian history lessons.
7.	Luo et al., (2020)	Investigate TGT in physical education (advanced basketball course) to improve learning motivation and motor skills.
8.	Haryono & Tukiyo (2022)	Combines TGT utilizing mobile learning as a means to develop recount text writing skills, with learning style as a moderating variable.

Disscussion

This section interprets the results of the three research questions, based on evidence in ***Table 1***. While guided by three questions, the thematic synthesis produced four parts: **Cognitive Impact** (**RQ1**) examines TGT's effectiveness in vocabulary mastery and cognitive outcomes; **Affective Impact** (**RQ2**) focuses on motivation, engagement, and socio-emotional aspects; **Contextual Fit** (**RQ1** & **RQ2**) explores adaptability across levels, subjects, and delivery modes; and **Implementation Challenges** (**RQ3**) outlines barriers and limitations in applying TGT.

Cognitive Impact: Effectiveness of TGT in Enhancing Vocabulary Mastery

Addressing **RQ1**, the main cognitive contribution of TGT method is its consistent improvement of vocabulary mastery among EFL learners. This effect appears across educational levels, from primary to tertiary, and in varied subject contexts ***Table 1***. Studies under the first research focus Adhaniyah (2024); Aidarahma et al., (2022); Dewi & Nasution (2024); R. Kamal et al., (2022); Karman & Indriani (2021); Nahak (2023); Rihanah & Sudiyono (2020); Usman et al., (2020) present strong empirical evidence of significant vocabulary gains from

TGT.

At the primary level, cognitive gains often result from integrating TGT with concrete tools and age-appropriate visuals. Aidarahma et al., (2022) used TGT with flashcards for four weeks with 30 Grade 4 students, raising scores from 62.4 to 85.1 (36% gain). This reflects how TGT enables repeated, meaningful encounters with target words, combining competitive retrieval practice with peer scaffolding—mechanisms aligned with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Craik & Lockhart's Depth of Processing framework. Likewise, Ramadillah & Yatri (2024) embedded science vocabulary in TGT, improving scores from 58.7 to 82.9 and increasing active participation from 60% to over 90%. These results show that engaging, content-rich contexts foster retention and comprehension, with benefits extending beyond young learners.

In secondary education, TGT supports gains in abstract vocabulary and academic discourse. Kamal et al. (2022) reported Grade 8 scores rising from 60.5 to 84.3 after TGT compared to a smaller control group gain (61.0 to 70.8). Dewi & Nasution (2024) found a 25-point increase among Grade 10 students, with greater willingness to use new vocabulary in context. Rihanah & Sudiyono (2020) observed more lexical risk-taking, with students attempting unfamiliar words during discussions, indicating deeper lexical competence. Karman & Indriani (2021), using Classroom Action Research (CAR), recorded gains from 66.0 (pre-test) to 88.2 (second cycle), showing that repeated TGT reinforces vocabulary retrieval and active use. Similar benefits appear in higher education.

At the tertiary level, TGT is effective even in specialized domains requiring technical vocabulary. Patil et al., (2023) integrated engineering terms into TGT producing an 18% vocabulary score increase. The game-based approach contextualized abstract terms in problem-solving tasks, consistent with Situated Learning Theory's view that authentic contexts enhance transfer and retention.

Meta-level evidence reinforces the cognitive case for TGT. Zhang's (2023) meta-analysis of 15 gamified learning studies reported a mean effect size of 0.72 for vocabulary outcomes,

rated moderate-to-large. Wibowo's (2024) synthesis of 25 studies confirmed vocabulary retention as a consistent benefit, attributing its strength to repetition, competition, and collaboration.

Collectively, these studies indicate that TGT enhances cognitive outcomes by combining the motivational stimulus of competition with the collaborative reinforcement of cooperative learning. This interplay fosters frequent, meaningful vocabulary retrieval and use, leading to more durable retention.

Affective Impact: Effects of TGT on Learner Motivation and Engagement

Addressing **RQ2**, the affective dimension of learning, which includes motivation, engagement, confidence, and emotional response, is a consistent strength of TGT across the reviewed studies. As shown in ***Table 1***, many studies, including Afifah & Priyana (2024); Baydar (2020); Karman & Indriani (2021); Nahak (2023); Shahid et al. (2024); Tsai (2024); Usman et al. (2020); Yazid et al. (2024); Zhang (2024), report that TGT fosters a positive classroom atmosphere, boosts learner enthusiasm, and sustains participation throughout lessons.

Motivation gains are often linked to TGT's balance of competition and cooperation. Rihanah & Sudiyono (2020) found that 85% of students described TGT as "very motivating," citing enjoyment, variety, and teamwork. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which states that intrinsic motivation increases when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are present in TGT's design. Autonomy arises when students make strategic game decisions; competence is reinforced by immediate feedback; and relatedness develops through peer collaboration toward a shared goal.

Quantitative evidence supports TGT's positive affective effects. Oktarianto & Handayanto (2021) recorded motivation scores on a five-point Likert scale rising from 3.4 to 4.6 after implementation. Ramadillah & Yatri (2024) found active participation in science vocabulary lessons increased from 60% to 94% after TGT, while Saputri et al. (2023) reported gains from 55% to 88% using domino card media in history

classes. These participation gains reflect greater enjoyment and deeper behavioral engagement with learning tasks.

These affective benefits are reinforced by gamification-oriented studies. Yazid et al., (2024) found that 78% of university students preferred gamified EFL learning over traditional lectures, citing higher satisfaction and perceived learning. Tsai (2024) reported that leaderboards and point systems raised satisfaction scores by 20%, while Afifah & Priyana (2024) noted that immediate feedback in gamified vocabulary tasks boosted emotional and behavioral engagement. In Ecuador, Axcel Ivan Luzardo et al., (2024) observed that gamification strategies similar to TGT enhanced emotional engagement and cooperation in community-based EFL programs.

Beyond motivation and engagement, several studies note socio-emotional benefits. Baydar (2020) found that pre-service teachers viewed TGT as a means to build self-confidence, teamwork, and resilience in classroom interactions. These outcomes indicate that TGT boosts immediate participation and supports long-term affective growth, which may sustain academic achievement. Overall, TGT's affective impact stems from merging playful competition with structured collaboration, creating a dynamic environment that meets psychological needs, reduces anxiety, and fosters ongoing involvement in language learning.

Contextual Fit: Adaptability of TGT Across Educational Settings

Addressing **RQ1** and **RQ2**, this section examines how the TGT model adapts to various educational contexts while sustaining its cognitive and affective benefits. As summarized in ***Table 1,*** the reviewed studies demonstrate that TGT's flexibility enables effective implementation across multiple educational levels, subject domains, and delivery modes, ranging from traditional face-to-face instruction to online and blended learning environments. This adaptability, which derives from its modular design, allows instructors to adjust the tournament's structure, content, and format to match specific learning objectives, available resources, and learner characteristics.

TGT can be integrated into existing lesson plans in face-to-face classroom settings with minimal technological requirements. For example, Saputri et al., (2023) applied TGT in Indonesian history lessons using domino card media, successfully increasing students' interest and participation. This case demonstrates that the competitive and collaborative dynamics of TGT can match subject matter in non-language subject contexts while still supporting vocabulary mastery and sustaining learner engagement, thereby addressing both **RQ1** and **RQ2**. By embedding content within relevant and enjoyable tasks, TGT fosters meaningful learning experiences that encourage active participation and cognitive retention.

In online and blended environments, TGT has been adapted to sustain interaction and engagement despite physical distance. Kenti Sugiyati & Indriani (2022) implemented TGT for online grammar instruction, using virtual breakout rooms and digital quizzes to replicate the dynamics of in-person tournaments. While the study reported improved comprehension and active participation, it also highlighted infrastructural challenges such as unstable internet connections and unequal access to devices. These findings suggest that the positive outcome of TGT in digital formats depends not only on instructional design but also on technological readiness, consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which identifies perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness as primary factors influencing adoption.

The adaptability of TGT further includes non-language subjects and skills-based instruction**.** Luo et al. (2020) incorporated TGT into an advanced basketball course, enhancing motor skill acquisition and motivation, while Haryono & Tukiyo (2022) combined TGT with mobile learning for recount text writing. The latter study found that learning styles moderated the performance of TGT, indicating that educators must consider learner diversity when adapting the method. These examples show that TGT's game-based structure can be contextualized for different domains, from physical education to writing, without losing its core pedagogical benefits.

The mechanisms enabling this adaptability include:

- Customizable content**:** instructors can replace question sets or tasks with domain-specific material.
- Flexible game formats**:** rules, scoring, and competition structures can be scaled to match lesson duration and complexity.
- Integration with varied media**:** TGT can be enhanced with physical props (cards, boards) or digital tools (quizzes, leaderboards), depending on available resources.

From a theoretical perspective, TGT's adaptability aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an approach that advocates diverse methods of engagement, representation, and expression. In practice, this means TGT can serve diverse learners by accommodating different modalities, providing multiple access points to the content, and fostering participation from all ability levels.

The cross-context evidence suggests that TGT could be extended beyond its current applications to address other educational challenges, such as remedial instruction for underperforming students, differentiated learning in mixed-ability classrooms, or professional development programs where active participation and knowledge retention are critical. The method's balance of structure and flexibility makes it a versatile tool for sustaining engagement and improving outcomes in varied instructional settings.

Implementation Challenges: Limitations and Barriers to Effective TGT Application

Addressing **RQ3**, this section discusses the challenges and limitations reported in implementing the TGT method, as identified in the reviewed studies. As summarized in ***Table 1***, although the TGT model has shown significant cognitive, affective, and contextual benefits, several recurring challenges can limit its effectiveness if not addressed. These challenges fall into four main categories: **pedagogical and classroom management issues, technological and resource constraints, cultural relevance,** and **sustainability of engagement.**

Pedagogical and Classroom Management Issues

One of the most frequently reported obstacles is uneven

participation among team members. In the study by Karman & Indriani (2021), more vocal or high-achieving students dominated gameplay during the early implementation cycles, while quieter or less proficient learners contributed minimally. This imbalance diluted the cooperative benefits of the TGT, reducing opportunities in order to peer-assisted learning that are essential for vocabulary reinforcement. Wibowo (2024) also noted difficulty aligning the TGT activities with tight curriculum pacing, limiting the number of review cycles, and potentially weakening the long-term retention effect. These issues highlight the need for structured team roles, rotational leadership, and scaffolded prompts to ensure that every learner is actively involved and benefits equally from the cooperative process.

Technological and Resource Constraints

In technology-mediated settings, limited resources can reduce the fidelity of the TGT implementation. Sugiyati & Indriani (2022) reported that unstable internet connections and unequal access to devices disrupted the flow of online grammar-based TGT sessions, leading to uneven participation and delayed feedback. Similarly, Haryono & Tukiyo (2022) found that integrating TGT into mobile learning increased teachers' preparation workload, requiring both content adaptation and technical proficiency. These findings align with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which suggests that if the perceived ease of use or usefulness of the method is compromised by technical difficulties, adoption and consistency may decline. In the Indonesian context, low-tech adaptations, such as printed question cards or offline scoring sheets, can be effective alternatives to maintain engagement without over-reliance on digital infrastructure.

Cultural Relevance and Content Appropriateness

Several gamification-focused studies, including Tsai (2024) and Zhou & Wei (2024), reported that when the content or game scenarios lacked cultural familiarity, students were less engaged and sometimes confused about the tasks. This is consistent with Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes that learning becomes most effective when facilitated through culturally meaningful tools and contexts.

For TGT to work optimally, game materials should integrate examples, themes, and vocabulary that resonate with learners' backgrounds. In Indonesia, for instance, adapting quiz content to include locally relevant topics, traditional games, or familiar contexts can enhance motivation and comprehension.

Sustainability of Engagement and Novelty Effects

Although many studies reported initial surges in motivation and participation, some teachers observed a gradual decline in enthusiasm when the TGT was used repeatedly without variation. This novelty effect, mentioned in observations within Wibowo (2024) and Karman & Indriani (2021), can reduce the competitive excitement that drives active engagement. If the method becomes too predictable, its affective and cognitive benefits may diminish over time. To address this, educators can diversify the competitive format, introduce new challenges or scoring systems, and alternate between cooperative and competitive phases to sustain interest.

Implications for Practice

Addressing these challenges requires intentional design and contextual adaptation. Teachers should implement role rotation and structured participation to counteract dominance patterns, use low-tech alternatives where digital infrastructure is limited, and ensure cultural customization of materials to maximize relevance. To preserve engagement over time, the TGT should be integrated strategically into the curriculum, such as for revision sessions or formative assessment, rather than as a daily routine. By anticipating and addressing these barriers, educators can maintain the balance between competition and cooperation that underpins TGT effectiveness. Overall, addressing these challenges is essential to preserving TGT's dual focus on competition and cooperation, ensuring its sustained effectiveness across varied instructional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review, synthesizing evidence from thirty-five empirical studies, confirms that TGT consistently enhances vocabulary mastery and fosters learner motivation and engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

classrooms across diverse educational levels and contexts. Empirical findings indicate that the TGT yields substantial vocabulary gains, with primary-level implementations often integrating visual aids and cooperative play producing improvements in vocabulary test scores ranging from 36% to 50%, while secondary-level applications recorded increases of approximately 12 to 25 points, and tertiary-level use demonstrated particular effectiveness in specialized vocabulary learning, such as technical and disciplinary terms. These results are consistent across various geographical and cultural settings, indicating that the core principles of TGT are adaptable to different curricula and educational environments. For instance, in Southeast Asian rural schools, TGT has been successfully adapted with locally relevant visual materials. At the same time, in European tertiary institutions, the model has been integrated with domain-specific terminology in engineering and medical faculties.

Beyond cognitive gains, TGT has been shown to increase both behavioral and cognitive engagement, encouraging learners to participate actively, take communicative risks, and build stronger interpersonal relationships in the target language, consistent with the core principles of Self-Determination Theory. In classroom scenarios, students often shift from passive reception to active collaboration, with even less confident learners participating in group discussions and competitive rounds. The method's capacity to integrate cooperative structures with competitive, game-based elements reinforces the theoretical foundations of Cooperative Learning Theory, Depth of Processing Theory, and Game-Based Learning Theory. Despite challenges such as uneven participation, technological limitations, and cultural mismatches in game content, the evidence demonstrates that TGT's flexibility allows context-sensitive adaptation, ensuring its relevance and applicability in varied EFL learning environments. This contribution is significant in advancing both the theoretical understanding and practical application of cooperative, game-

based approaches to vocabulary instruction, offering a robust, adaptable strategy that bridges motivation, engagement, and mastery in language learning.

Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of thirty-five empirical studies, several recommendations are proposed to optimize the application of the TGT approach to improve vocabulary acquisition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. These recommendations are drawn from the reviewed evidence, considering the benefits and the challenges identified in the implementation process.

1. Recommendations for Educators

The findings indicate that the TGT is most effective when implemented with clear learning objectives, structured roles, and balanced team composition. Teachers should form cooperative teams considering learners' proficiency levels and interpersonal dynamics, ensuring equitable participation among all members. Rotating roles within teams can prevent uneven contributions and strengthen individual accountability. Integrating varied vocabulary activities such as matching definitions, forming sentences in context, and recall tasks within the TGT sessions helps sustain engagement and supports different learning styles. In addition, assessment tools used alongside TGT should be aligned with the learning objectives and the nature of the game, ensuring that both formative and summative evaluations accurately capture learners' progress.

In primary education, combining the TGT with visual aids and cooperative play has been shown to produce substantial vocabulary gains. Incorporating content-specific vocabulary into the TGT activities can enhance subject knowledge alongside language learning in secondary education. In tertiary education, the TGT is particularly effective in supporting the mastery of technical or disciplinary vocabulary, enabling learners to acquire specialized terms relevant to their academic or professional fields. Teachers should also adapt

materials to accommodate visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learning preferences to maximize inclusivity, ensuring that all learners can engage fully with the activities.

Teachers can integrate interactive quizzes, digital leaderboards, and collaborative online spaces where technological resources are available to provide immediate feedback and track learner progress. In contexts with limited access to technology, the TGT can still be effectively implemented using paper-based materials, printed question cards, and manual scoreboards, demonstrating its adaptability. Embedding opportunities for post-game reflection and feedback after each session can further reinforce vocabulary retention and encourage learners to monitor their progress. Beyond end-of-session discussions, ongoing formative feedback during the games can help learners adjust strategies and deepen their understanding in real time.

2. Recommendations for Policymakers

Policymakers should recognize cooperative, game-based learning methods, including the TGT, as effective strategies for EFL instruction and integrate them into curriculum guidelines. Providing professional development opportunities is essential to equip teachers with the theoretical understanding and the practical skills necessary to implement TGT effectively. Such training should include guidance on structuring teams, designing game content, and adapting materials to meet diverse classrooms' cultural and linguistic needs.

Allocating resources for adequate technological infrastructure, such as reliable internet access, sufficient devices, and technical support, will enable wider use of TGT in digital or blended learning environments. In schools where technology is limited, funding the development of culturally responsive teaching resources contextualized to local needs can help ensure that TGT activities are relevant, engaging, and accessible to all learners. Including TGT-based approaches in policy frameworks for teacher evaluation and school performance can further encourage sustained adoption.

3. Recommendations for Future Research

While current studies provide strong evidence for TGT effectiveness in vocabulary learning, additional research is required to investigate its long-term impact on vocabulary retention, as most existing studies focus on short-term outcomes. Longitudinal research would help determine whether vocabulary gains are maintained over time and transferred to real-world language use, particularly in productive skills such as speaking and writing.

Future studies should also explore the effectiveness of TGT with different types of vocabulary, such as academic, general, and technical terms, and across various proficiency levels. Research in multilingual classrooms is another important direction, particularly in examining how cultural and linguistic diversity affects the implementation and outcomes of TGT. For example, multilingual settings may present challenges such as code-switching or varying familiarity with Latin versus non-Latin scripts, which could influence participation and retention. Additionally, more studies should focus on the role of technology in TGT, evaluating how digital tools from quiz-based mobile applications to immersive virtual reality environments affect learner motivation, participation, and retention.

Employing mixed-methods research that combines quantitative achievement measures with qualitative insights into learner attitudes and experiences could provide a deeper understanding of the TGT pedagogical value. Experimental designs comparing TGT to other cooperative learning models could also highlight the unique mechanisms through which TGT supports vocabulary development.

By following these recommendations, educators, policymakers, and researchers can work together to refine the implementation of TGT, ensuring that its cognitive, motivational, and social benefits are fully realized in diverse EFL learning environments.

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