



Using Games and Songs in EFL Vocabulary Teaching

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2583-8261

Volume: 05

Issue: 01

Received: 19-11-2025

Accepted: 21-12-2025

Published: 18-01-2026

Page No: 86-97

Abstract

Games and songs are increasingly seen as effective educational instruments in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, especially for vocabulary instruction. Nonetheless, studies investigating the perceptions of both pre-service teachers and teacher educators within Vietnamese contexts remain limited. This study examines the perceptions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators regarding the advantages, obstacles, and roles of using games and songs in EFL vocabulary training, while also identifying effective ways for classroom integration. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, incorporating questionnaires administered to 100 pre-service teachers and 9 teacher educators at HUFLIT, alongside a semi-structured interview with 10 pre-service teachers and 3 teacher educators. Findings show that both groups benefit from activities and songs that improve student engagement, language retention, and emotional support, while also dealing with some limitations. Suggested solutions, such as careful lesson planning, contextual adaptation, scaffolding, and systematic integration, underscore the necessity for teacher education programs to equip future educators for enhanced integration of games and songs *in vocabulary training*.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJSSER.2026.5.1.86-97>

Keywords: EFL vocabulary teaching, games and songs, pre-service teachers, teacher educators, pedagogical strategies

Introduction

Vocabulary is a key part of communication (Nation, 2001), especially in EFL contexts such as Vietnam, it is a big challenge to ensure that vocabulary acquisition is fun, memorable and fits the need of the students. Traditional approaches to vocabulary teaching have been replaced by learner-centered approaches that highlight the use of games and songs to promote students' engagement and create an active and interactive learning environment that improves students' interests and passion (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2002) ^[4]. It has been demonstrated that games provide safe and engaging learning conditions that lessen anxiety, boost motivation, enhance collaborative efforts, and improve long termed memory with real-world interaction (Martinson & Chu, 2008; Wright *et al.*, 2005) ^[21,42]. The obstacles, however, are time, resources, teacher training, and classroom management (Cheng & Lee, 2019) ^[6]. Similarly, music promotes relaxation, cultural awareness, enhanced memory, pronunciation, and diversity (Saricoban & Metin, 2000 ^[34]; Delibegović Dzanić, 2016) ^[8]. In teacher education, it is important to know how pre-service teachers and teacher educators see these instruments. Pre-service teachers prioritize the capacity to engage in enjoyable activities and utilize these tools within the classroom, yet they cannot afford to be deficient in confidence, time management, and classroom authority (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020) ^[29]. In contrast, teacher educators concentrate on curriculum alignment, reflective practice, and systemic challenges (Zeichner, 2010; Farrell, 2015) ^[43]. The strategies that ensure effective integration include adequate lesson planning, observation of peers, adapting to context and availability of ready-make resources (Murphey, 1992; Nguyen, 2021) ^[24]. Examining both perspectives offers pre-service teachers' deep insight into how pedagogical tools are integrated in real classroom.

practice. Although more research has explored the effectiveness of games and songs in language learning, few studies that investigate the perceptions and strategies of both pre-service teachers and teacher educators, particularly in the Vietnamese EFL context. Addressing this gap, the aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of senior pre-service teachers— English teaching majors—and experienced teacher educators, both at Faculty of foreign languages (FFL), Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages - Information Technology (HUFLIT), regarding the benefits, challenges and roles of using games and songs in teaching vocabulary to EFL learners. The study also identifies key strategies contributing to improving the quality of teacher training, increasing the applicability of games and songs in the EFL classroom, and thereby creating a more effective and encouraging vocabulary learning environment for students. In line with these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What perceptions do pre-service teachers and teacher educators hold regarding the benefits, challenges, and pedagogical roles of using games and songs in EFL vocabulary teaching?

RQ2: What strategies do pre-service teachers and teacher educators suggest for the effective integration of games and songs into EFL context?

This aim of this paper is to provide practical recommendations for teacher education programs that not only highlight current practices and perceptions but also contribute to enhance the training of future English teachers through the more systematic and effective use of games and songs.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework of Vocabulary Learning and Teaching

Nation (2001) pointed out that receptive vocabularies encompass words that learners use in listening and reading, whereas productive vocabularies pertain to words that learners apply in writing or speaking. So, good vocabulary teaching should try to improve both receptive and productive skills by having students interact with each other often, use words on purpose, and practice in context. Nation (2001) also emphasized the importance of deep processing *in* vocabulary acquisition. Words obtained through meaningful engagement, emotional connection, and contextual application are more easily retained than those learned through isolated memorization of word lists. This theoretical framework corresponds closely with the pedagogical rationale for utilizing games and music, as these methods inherently promote repetition, contextualization, and emotional engagement. This study adopts Nation's framework as an analytical lens to explore the perceptions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators within the advantages, challenges, and suggested games and songs in teaching vocabulary in order to incorporate these tools into EFL vocabulary instruction effectively.

Games in EFL Vocabulary Learning and Teaching

One of the outstanding benefits of using games in EFL vocabulary instruction is their ability to create an enjoyable and motivating learning environment, different from

traditional methods. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2005) observed that games bring fun and maintain the interest of students in classes whereas Lee (1995) ^[20] emphasized that games are a refreshing break. Games are also useful for learning new words and remembering them for a long period. Fatimah and Masduqi (2021) ^[11] contend that conventional approaches, which prioritize the memory of disjointed word lists, lead to students forgetting words acquired in isolation. Games, on the other hand, teach you things while keeping these constraints in mind. Allen (1983) has also pointed out that games naturally support the target words needed to reach the goals, so they become useful and relevant right away. Therefore, this association of a word and its role in the game context enhances understanding and memory. As Turuta (2021) stated, games also change learners from passive to active ones by putting them in a central role. Games not only help with vocabulary memorization but also make the entire process more engaging, productive, and closer to effective practice. Games also gain obvious emotional and social advantages, providing opportunities for learners to engage with each other in an energetic and accommodating environment, in which learning and communication will become automatic before, during and after the task (Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby, 2005). Games are especially good for working together since Antonaros and Couri (2003, as cited in Asafari, n.d.) said that they help people *get along*, follow the rules, teach one other, and learn together. When working in small groups, students adjust their abilities to express arguments, seek support, and collaborate effectively (Jacobs & Kline, 1996) ^[17]. Moreover, the level of competitiveness and cooperation stimulated by games, as well as turn-taking practice (Turuta, 2021), is a strong factor supporting communicative competence development. Importantly, games are interactive and demand the use of real language (Turuta, 2021), showing that games move learners beyond artificial drills into purposeful language application. In addition, games enable us to decrease the levels of language anxiety and develop the confidence of learners, which is achieved through providing them with safe, no-stakes risk-taking opportunities (Dewaele and Macintyre, 2014) ^[9]. Huyen and Nga (2003, as cited in Fatimah & Masduqi, 2021) ^[11] also asserted that games fulfill key principles of communicative competence, especially the need for realistic interaction. Thus, games are not only a means of communication, but a necessity in fluent and confident EFL speaker development, and therefore they can be considered a necessity in teaching and learning. This helps make sure learners become both competent and confident in their English classes.

However, challenges accompany these benefits. One commonly referred barrier to integrating vocabulary games into the EFL classroom is the lack of time to teach and the pressures of a rigid curriculum. According to Pinter (2006, p.89) ^[32], the planning, choice and careful design of suitable games require the educator to spend a lot of time in conceptualization, implying that vocabulary games are not a classroom activity but rather a process that requires much work behind the scenes, usually unnoticed and not paid. Although games can greatly enhance the vocabulary learning process, their introduction can be very problematic because of the lack of resources, particularly in poorly financed schools (Hébert, Jenson & Terzopoulos, 2021) ^[16]. A study by pre-service teachers also highlights that one of the major barriers to implementing game-based learning is the

lack of financial resources, ICT infrastructure, and training because pre-service teachers often refer to financial limitations and the insufficient infrastructure as the reasons for low usage of digital games (Kaimara *et al.*, 2021) ^[18]. Although games can naturally create an engaging learning environment, as Harmer (2007, p. 325) ^[15] explains, there is a big pedagogical problem with trying to match vocabulary learning objectives with games. This leads to another difficulty, which is the lack of teacher training. Many pre-service teachers feel unprepared to design meaningful games that connect with their vocabulary teaching goals due to a lack of training. A game can be fun but lacks an educational purpose, which can lead to students simply playing for fun without actually learning (Harmer, 2007) ^[15]. Many researchers highlight that effective classroom management is crucial for keeping games for educational purposes. Connolly (2023) ^[7] stated that this involves understanding and evaluating the several ways that learners excel. The diverse of learners; however, makes things harder. As Feemuedee (2025) ^[12] mentioned, management solutions need to be tailored to meet the demands of all students, such as their talents, cultures, languages, and learning styles. These problems show how important it is for teachers to know how to choose and use games in the right way.

Songs in EFL Vocabulary Teaching

The very obvious advantage of utilizing songs to teach vocabulary to EFL students is their strong tendency to improve motivation and reduce anxiety. Saricoban and Metin (2000) confirmed that songs minimize affective filters in students, improving vocabulary acquisition in a low-anxiety setting. Confidence is an essential part of the second language learning process and songs create a safe, non-discriminative atmosphere in which the learners feel freer to take linguistic risks (Sevik, 2012). The other important advantage of using songs in teaching vocabulary to EFL students is the fact that through rhythm, rhyme and melody, songs help a learner to retain a lot of information. Medina (1993) ^[22] affirmed that songs are helpful in memory retention due to the repetition of structure, rhymes, and melodies as potent mnemonic devices to acquire vocabulary in the long run. Scharenborg and Larson (2018) also back this point by proving that a musical context not only helps learners to break down words, but also enhances auditory recognition, enabling them to better differentiate and place vocabulary into storage. Secondly, songs aid a great deal in improving pronunciation, intonation and phonemic awareness among the students or learners. According to Fonseca-Mora (2000) ^[13], listening and singing songs repeated assists the students to acquire outstanding pronunciation, intonation, and phonemic awareness. Then, the capacity of songs to speak to different learning styles is one of the most adaptable strengths in using songs as a tool in teaching vocabulary which makes the learning of language more inclusive and interactive to different groups of learners. Millington (2011) ^[23] confirms that songs are more helpful with auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners as they can make vocabulary instruction more inclusive and participatory.

Nevertheless, the use of songs also presents challenges. Although songs help to make the learning process more interesting, musical form may distract students unintentionally since they lose focus on the music content. As an example, Calvert and Billingsley (1998) ^[5] postulated that a too complex or unfamiliar melody could slow down

vocabulary learning by congesting the cognitive capacity of learners. Secondly, the selection of appropriate songs for EFL learners is much more complex than it appears. Learners may lose interest and lose focus as Nation (2007) warned when they are compelled to listen to songs that they find boring or irrelevant. In addition, although music has been shown to be very useful in language education, not every teacher believes that they should use songs. Reilly and Ward (1997) ^[33] also indicated that there are pre-service teachers who might not have musical confidence or the pedagogical education to incorporate the use of songs with the systematic curriculum of teach vocabulary. The linguistic distance between the lyrics of the songs and normal conversational English is one of the major weaknesses of using songs to teach vocabulary. According to Richards (1969, as cited in Adnyani & Dewi, 2020, p.88) ^[1], the language, vocabulary, and sentence construction of a few songs may be very different from what is spoken in English.

Roles of Pre-service Teachers and Teacher Educators

Pedagogical beliefs have been continually shaped by theoretical coursework, practical teaching experiences, and observation of role models as pre-service teachers are in a transitional stage. Their perceptions of games and songs influence whether and how they will use these tools in future classrooms. Mentors or teacher educators, on the other hand, play a key guiding role by modeling pedagogical practices, designing curriculum, and offering training methodologies to pre-service teachers. Experienced teachers can help pre-service teachers reflect by talking with them after lessons, pointing out strengths, and suggesting changes because as Shin and Crandall (2014) stated, pre-service teachers who get an opportunity to observe skilled teachers show how to use songs in a clear manner, including providing step-by-step instructions and follow-up exercises, tend to be more confident and more successful in their attempts to employ those methods in their classrooms. Differences between these two groups' perceptions can reveal gaps between pedagogical ideals and classroom realities.

Pedagogical strategies to overcome challenges

Firstly, to handle time constraints, pre-service teachers are able to match games with desired vocabulary in the curriculum so that play-based learning can be used to achieve desired results. Integrating micro-games during transition periods or short review games that involve key vocabulary within less than 10 minutes. Games are also ideal when used in flipped classrooms or homework assignments to maximize instructional time (Nguyen, 2021). Vocabulary learning must be integrated throughout the curriculum, as Nation (2007) points to the ability of teachers to incorporate game-based activities in the context of larger language goals. Secondly, no-tech options like drawing games, charades, or vocabulary dominoes may be very effective in resource-constrained contexts. Brewster *et al.* (2002) ^[4] emphasize that several physical games can be conducted using recycled or improvised resources, which promote creativity and low-cost innovation. Numerous scholars also endorse the application of paper-based interactive games that trigger mental activity without relying on technology. Moreover, games-based methodology, microteaching workshops, and reflective journaling should be added to pre-service training to foster skills. Shulman (1987) ^[38] emphasizes the role of pedagogical content knowledge when he explains that learning how to

deliver vocabulary with interesting formats is just as essential as knowing what to deliver. The sociocultural theory developed by Vygotsky (1978) also confirms that collaboration with scaffolding assists learners in the inclusion process, in which the teacher educator model and design of co-constructed games. For classroom management, before the game play, the teachers need to predict the dynamics of the behavior and set expectations. According to Farrell (2015), it is necessary to establish clear rules and engage students in the formulation of game norms, which makes them more responsible. Setting up routine systems surrounding the game minimizes chaos in transitions and maximizes learning time (Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby, 2005). Finally, differentiation is essential for inclusivity. Nguyen (2021) suggests setting all learners on a similar playing field and peer-assisted learning where everyone can actively participate. The theory of multiple intelligences by Gardner (1993) ^[14] allows using different types of games that include visual, kinesthetic, and interpersonal to adapt to the learning style of a person.

For integrating songs in EFL classrooms, teachers should also use simple, repetitive songs and match them with concentration exercises on vocabulary to limit distraction. Medina (1993) ^[22] focuses on organized listening tasks such as sequencing lyrics or finding synonyms, which make a learner the center of attention. Brewster *et al.* (2002) ^[4] also promote the use of regular patterns in the songs and learning through gestures to maintain high levels of concentration. To select appropriate songs, a sustainable solution is the production of a vetted database of songs that can be customized to language levels and lexical themes. This can be facilitated by websites like SongsForTeaching and LyricsTraining. According to Nation and Newton (1997) to achieve maximum retention, it is advisable to use songs that have high-frequency vocabulary with contextual clarity. Additionally, confidence is nurtured by exposure and professional assistance. Peer-observation sessions are another recommendation of Farrell (2015) as pre-service teachers can observe experienced teacher educators using songs. Preparing pre-service teachers with ready-prepared song worksheets and an explanation also helps to relieve

anxiety and enhance competence (Murphey, 1992) ^[24]. Critical thinking can be improved by teaching students to recognize idiomatic or dated phrases. According to Nguyen (2021), it is recommended to make side-by-side comparisons between song lyrics and common phrases. This practice creates language awareness, and enhances pragmatic competence, enabling the students to learn when and how to apply particular vocabulary.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining percentages from the survey and data from the interview to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions and suggested strategies. Participants included 100 senior pre-service teachers majoring in English teaching and 9 teacher educators from faculty of foreign languages at HUFLIT university. The pre-service teachers took classes on teaching methodologies and did a teaching practicum at high schools in Vietnam. Many of them have already taught at language centers before. Teacher educators have a lot of experience in teaching English in EFL classes, TESOL courses as well as training teachers' courses at HUFLIT. Two main tools were used to collect data including questionnaires with Likert-scale and open-ended questions about perceived benefits, challenges, roles, and strategies. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with groups of participants from both pre-service teachers and teacher educators to gain more profound insights into their experiences and viewpoints. The survey data were subjected to descriptive analysis to discern overarching concepts and experiences of both groups, while qualitative data from open-ended responses and interviews underwent thematic analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Findings were organized according to the two research questions.

Perceptions of Benefits, Challenges, and Roles (RQ1)

Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions

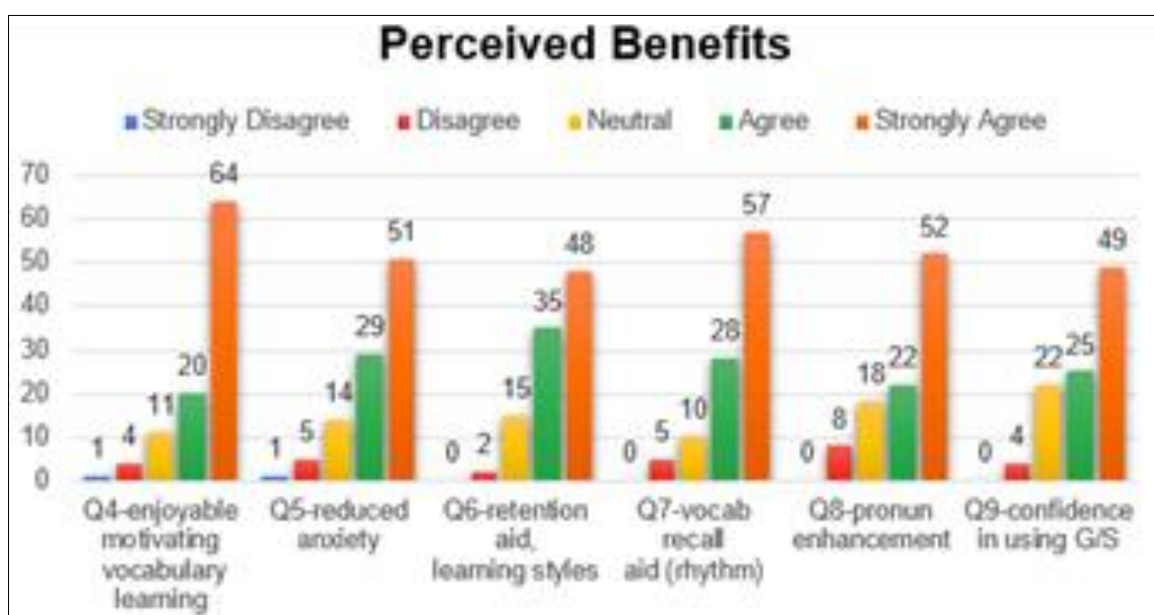


Fig 1 : Perceived Benefits of using Games and songs in English vocabulary

To better understand how pre-service teachers viewed the benefits, challenges and roles of them in using games and songs for vocabulary lessons, seventeen survey questions (Q4–Q17) were distributed to 100 participants. As shown in Figures 1–3, the results reveal among strong benefits, notable challenges and roles of them. Figure 1 shows perceived benefits of using Games and Songs in English vocabulary teaching. A large majority of pre-service teachers reported that both games and songs brought substantial pedagogical benefits to vocabulary instruction. In terms of motivation, 84% (n = 84) of participants agreed that games and songs made learning more enjoyable and motivating (Q4). Similarly, 80% (n = 80) (Q5) believed these activities reduced anxiety and encouraged students to participate more actively. These findings corroborate with prior studies highlighting the motivational potential of interactive techniques (Saricoban & Metin, 2000; Sevik, 2011; Millington, 2011) [34,23]. Beyond motivation, pre-service teachers also recognized the value of games and songs in facilitating vocabulary retention. According to Q6, 83% (n = 83) of participants agreed that games and songs help students

remember lexical items over time. Moreover, 85% (n = 85) (Q7) noted that songs, in particular, improved memory through rhythm and repetition. Such results resonate with previous research (Medina, 1993) [22], which emphasizes the role of multimodal stimuli in deep processing. Pronunciation and listening improvement were also note. 74% (n = 74) of pre-service teachers reported that songs enhanced students' stress and intonation patterns (Q8), which supports Murphey's (1992) [24] claim that songs naturally improve rhythm and intonation, and echoed Nation's (2001) emphasis on repeated exposure aiding pronunciation development. Confidence in applying games and songs was relatively high. Q9 revealed that 74% (n = 74) of participants felt confident using these techniques, while 22% (n = 22) expressed neutral views. This variation suggests that effectiveness may depend on the teaching situation, as Paquette and Rieg (2008) also emphasized. Overall, the results show that games and songs not only motivate learners and reduce anxiety but also strengthen memory, improve pronunciation, and support teacher confidence in the classroom.

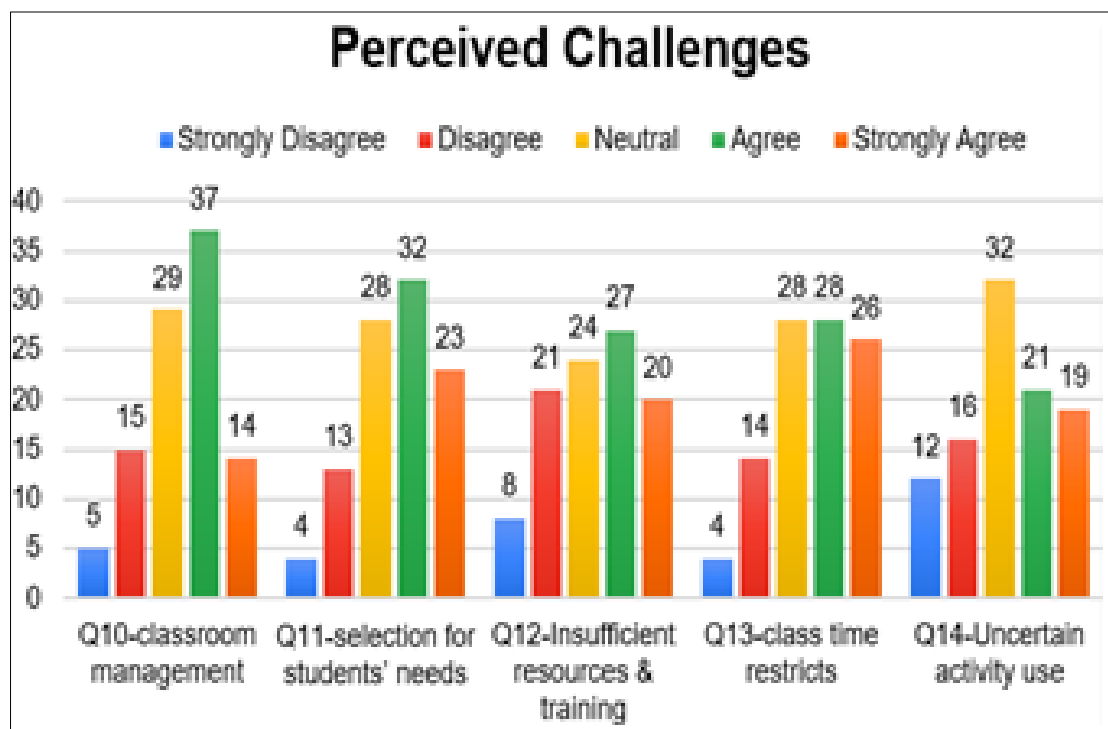


Fig 2: Perceived Challenges of using Games and Songs in English vocabulary

Despite the positive attitudes, Figure 2 shows that pre-service teachers also provided a range of challenges that may hinder effective implementation. First, classroom management emerged as a major concern. In Q10, 51% (n = 51) of participants admitted that they struggled to keep learners at task during games and songs, while about one-third remained uncertain, a concern that aligns with Sousa *et al.* (2023) [39], who both warned that without careful control, such activities might distract learners from language objectives. Selecting appropriate resources

was also a challenge with 55% reported difficulties in finding suitable materials that matched learners' age, proficiency, and language focus, echoing Murphey's (1992) [24] caution about the need for careful material selection. Inadequate resources or training account for 47%, time constraints 54%, and uneven confidence levels 40%, which limit the consistent application of games and songs in practice. These trends may be linked to gaps in prior training and classroom experience.

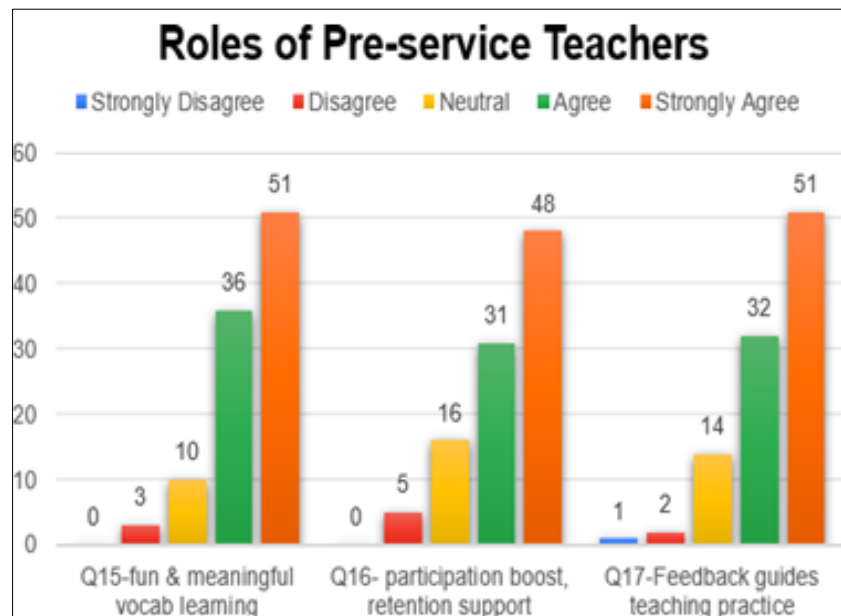


Fig 3: Perceived Roles of Pre-service Teachers in using Games and Songs in English vocabulary

Figure 3 illustrates the perceived roles of pre-service teachers in employing games and songs for vocabulary instruction providing insights into both their confidence and pedagogical perspectives. A strong majority, 87% (n = 87) (Q15), believed that these activities helped them retain vocabulary more effectively, mainly because they created a meaningful and emotionally supportive learning atmosphere. This aligns with Nation's (2001) argument about the affective dimension of language learning. Similarly, 79% (Q16) highlighted that games and songs, by combining movement, repetition, and interaction, increased active participation and enhanced vocabulary retention, echoes Pinter's (2006) [32] emphasis on engagement. In terms of professional development, Q17 showed that 83% of participants supported reflective practice to improve the use of games and songs, with minimal disagreement. This finding aligns with Farrell (2015), who emphasized reflective practice as a cornerstone of teacher growth.

The interviews revealed that most participants perceived games and songs as beneficial tools for teaching vocabulary. Specifically, 8 out of 10 participants (80%) affirmed that these activities make English classes more dynamic, enjoyable, and less stress. For example, Participant 5 explained that "friendly competitions with small rewards keep students engaged" while Participant 6 emphasized that "a well-time game can re-energize a tired class." This echoes Murphey's (1992) [24] argument that songs reduce anxiety and foster supportive learning environment. Songs were also highlighted for their linguistic benefits. Participant 4 stated that "music aids both memory and pronunciation" while Participant 9 described organize lyrics as a "fun and effective way to interact with language." Similarly, several participants observed that sing along supports listening and speaking development, reflecting Nation's (2001) view on the affective dimension of language learning and Pinter's (2006) [32] emphasis on multisensory engagement. Moreover, two participants (P7 and P10) pointed out that "preparing and adapting activities encouraged creativity and strengthened

the teacher-student connection", which aligns with Farrell's (2015) notion of reflective practice in teacher growth. Nevertheless, challenges were consistently mentioned. Half of the participants (5/10) reported that preparation was time-consuming (P2) and that lessons required rehearsals to anticipate potential problems (P3). Classroom management was another major concern, as Participant 1 explained that "noise levels rise quickly" while Participant 2 added that "ensuring fair participation can be difficult." Additionally, 4 participants (40%) (P5, P8, P10, P7) cited limited resources, technology issues, and the difficulty of selecting appropriate songs as barriers. This aligns with Saricoban and Metin's (2000) observation that choosing suitable songs for language classrooms is often problem. As Participant 3 concluded, "thinking creatively in challenging situations is simply part of what makes a good teacher." They stressed, however, that institutional support—such as ready-made materials, reliable technology, and professional training—is crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of these activities. Importantly, many participants viewed these challenges not only as obstacles but also as opportunities to grow more resourceful, confident, and adaptable as future teachers.

Pre-service teachers generally see themselves as facilitators of engaging and supportive classroom environments. One participant emphasized, "I see myself as the one who creates a playful environment where students can explore vocabulary naturally" (P3). Another pointed out the pedagogical purpose of using these activities, stating, "It is not just about playing games; I must guide students to connect words in the song with real-life contexts" (P7). Moreover, adaptability was highlighted as a crucial part of their role, with one pre-service teacher noting, "We have to adjust activities to students' levels, otherwise they get bored or frustrated" (P9). These responses underscore that pre-service teachers not only focus on fun and motivation but also taking responsibility for aligning activities with learning goals and managing learner diversity.

Teacher Educators’ Perceptions

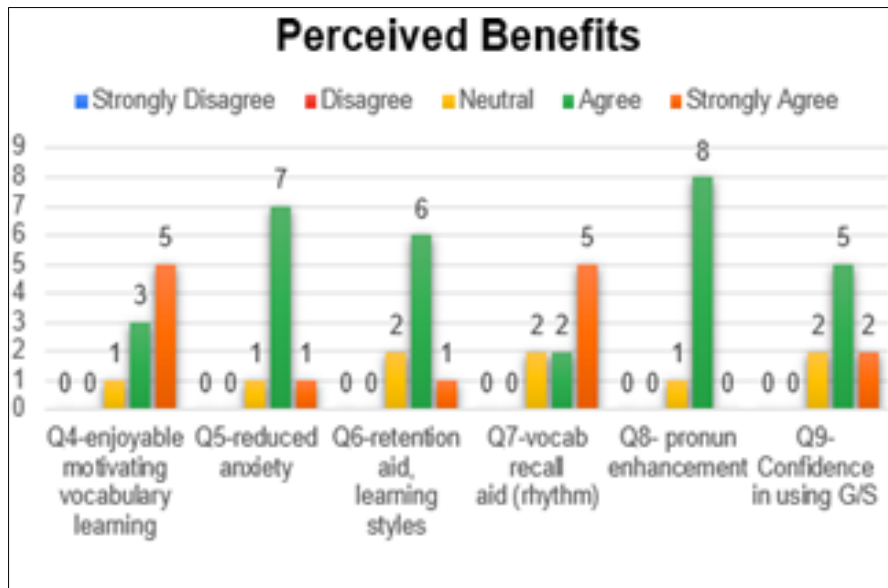


Fig 4: Perceived Benefits of using Games and Songs in English vocabulary

To better understand how teacher educators viewed the benefits, challenges and roles in using games and songs for vocabulary lessons, sixteen survey questions (Q4–19) were provided, with responses rated on a five-point Likert scale. Nine teacher educators participated.

Figure 4 illustrates the perceptions of teacher educators toward benefits of using games and songs in English vocabulary teaching. Teacher educators expressed predominantly positive views, although their responses reflected more cautious and experience-based perspectives compared to pre-service teachers. In terms of motivational benefits, 8 out of 9 participants (89%) agreed that games and songs made vocabulary learning more enjoyable and encouraging (Q4). Similarly, 8 out of 9 (89%) endorsed that games and songs helped alleviate learner anxiety and foster active participation (Q5), supporting Krashen’s (1989) [19] affective filter hypothesis. Regarding retention, 7 participants

(78%) recognized the role of games and songs in facilitating memory and accommodating different learning styles (Q6). This aligns with Gardner’s (1993) [14] theory of multiple intelligences, suggests that rhythm and play appeal to diverse learner references. More specifically, 7 participants (78%) strongly agreed and agreed that songs support long-termed memory through rhythm and melody (Q7), echoes Paquette and Rieg’s (2008) emphasis on music as a mnemonic tool. Pronunciation improvement was also widely acknowledged: 8 out of 9 (89%) agreed that songs enhance stress and intonation patterns (Q8), which is consistent with Murphey (1992) [24] and Harmer (2007) [15]. Confidence in using games and songs was fair high, with 7 participants (78%) agreeing though the relatively low number of “strongly agree” responses suggests that some teacher educators perceived a need for further methodological refinement.

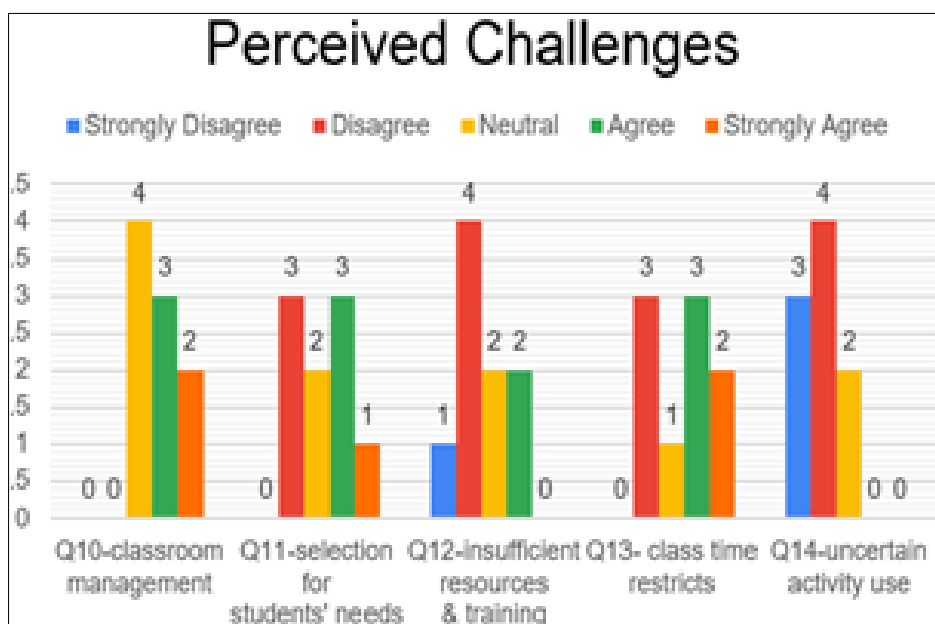


Fig 5: Perceived Challenges of using Games and Songs in English Vocabulary

Figure 5 illustrates the perceptions of teacher educators toward challenges of using games and songs in English vocabulary teaching. Challenges were acknowledged but to a less extent than among pre-service teachers. Classroom management was mentioned by 5 out of 9 (55%) as a concern (Q10), which reflects Turuta's (2021) observation that interactive tasks can cause behavioral unpredictability. Interestingly, 5 out of 9 disagreed that a lack of resources or training was barriers (Q12). Time constraints (55%), echoes

Sousa's (2023) point about the difficulty of balance creativity with curricular demands. Notably, confidence in pedagogical use was strongly, 7 participants (78%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with feeling unsure about integrating games and songs effectively, which demonstrate their professional competence in aligning games and songs with instructional goals (Kaimara et. al, 2021) [18].

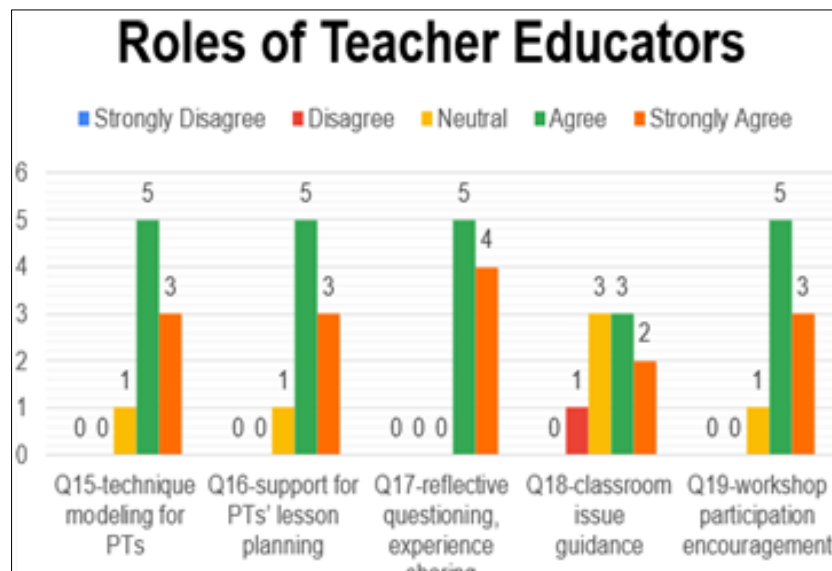


Fig 6: Perceived Roles of Teacher Educators insuing Games and Songs for English vocabulary

Figure 6 illustrates the perceived roles of teacher educators in employing games and songs for vocabulary instruction. 8 out of 9 participants (89%) agreed in Q15–Q16 that games and songs providing affective and mnemonic benefits, enhances engagement and supporting memory retention, which reflects Asher's (1977) emphasis on embodied learning and Nation and Webb's (2011) discussion of vocabulary consolidation. In Q17, all participants (100%) endorsed reflective practice as essential for professional growth, direct align with Shulman's (1987) [38] and Farrell (2015) arguments that reflective engagement is central to teacher development. Regarding Q18, 5 participants (55%) agreed that games and songs can be aligned with assessment and outcomes, indicates the need for stronger curricular support. Finally, in Q19, 8 participants (89%) valued training, peer support, workshop participation encouragement and resource sharing for confidence-building, consistent with Nguyen's (2021) findings at the role of collaboration in sustaining professional practice. Taken together, these findings indicate that while teacher educators strongly value games and songs for motivation, retention, pronunciation, and reflective practice, they remain attentive to contextual challenges such as time, classroom management, and resource selection. Their balance stand suggests that they not only endorsed games and songs but also critically evaluated their application, positioning themselves as role models in preparing pre-service teachers for both the benefits and the realities of classroom implementation.

From the interviews, all three teacher educators (100%) emphasized that games are not merely entertaining activities but foster concentration, active participation, memory retention, teamwork, and confidence-buildings. As one participant noted, "games encourage learners to take risks and

collaborate, while remembering vocabulary more effectively" (P2). This finding echo Nation and Webb's (2011) argument that games promote active recall and learner engagement. Similarly, Songs were unanimous (100%, n = 3) praised for their contextualize input, since idioms, collocations, and everyday expressions are embedded in lyrics. One teacher educator explained that rhythm and melody "stimulate multiple senses and strengthen long-term memory, especially for young learners" (P1), consistent with Murphey's (1992) [24] claim that songs enhance pronunciation, memory, and affective engagement. Songs were also value for their flexibility, allow for activities such as gap-fills, matching, and analysis tasks.

However, two participants (67%, P1, P2) observed that many pre-service teachers tended to over-rely on ready-make platforms like Kahoot or Bamboozle, instead of adapting or designing their own activities. This aligns with Nguyen's (2021) discussion of limited creativity and contextual adaptation in classroom practice. One educator (P2) added that "matching games or quizzes are often used mechanically without considering lesson stages or learner proficiency" highlight a gap in pedagogical alignment. Classroom management was another recur concern, two participants (67%, P1, P2) noted that activities sometimes led to discipline issues, with "some students becoming over- excited while others disengaged." This observation mirrors Sousa's (2023) point that songs and games can generate uneven participation if not carefully managed. Structural constraints were also evident, two participants (67%, P2, P3) stressed that large class sizes, limit training hours, and the lack of authentic teaching environments restricted feedback opportunities and realistic practice, echo Scharenborg et al. (2018) [35]. In conclusion, teacher educators unanimously recognized the

motivational and cognitive benefits of games and songs but highlights persistent challenges related to creativity, adaptability, classroom management, and institutional constraints. They suggested that games and songs should be treated as supplementary tools that trigger interaction and situated learning rather than replacements for cored instruction, reinforcing the need for creativity, contextualization, and alignment with lesson objectives.

Teacher educators, in contrast, identified their role primarily as mentors and pedagogical guides. As one explained, “Our role is to provide clear models and classroom-tested strategies for using games and songs effectively” (P1).

Suggested Strategies for Effective Integration (RQ2)

Pre-service Teachers’ Suggested Strategies

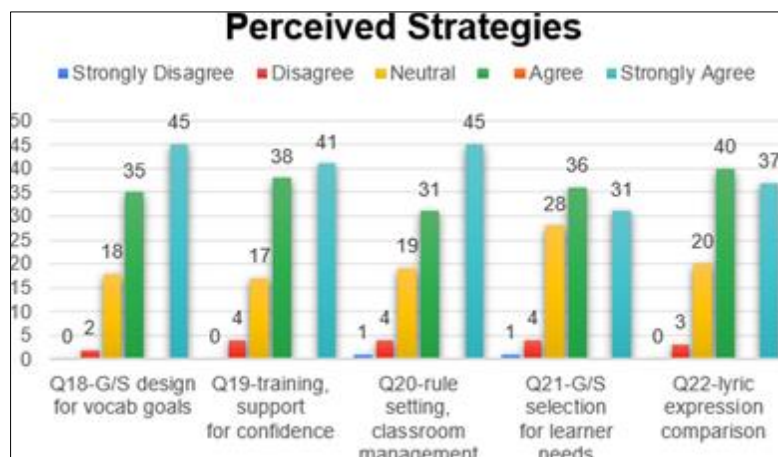


Fig 7: Perceived Strategies in using Games and Songs for English vocabulary

To better understand what strategies pre-service teachers find effective when using games and songs in vocabulary teaching, both closed and open-ended survey items, together with interviews, were analyzed.

Figure 7 illustrates the perceptions of teacher educators towards strategies of using games and songs in English vocabulary teaching. First, 80% (n = 80/100) of pre-service teachers (Q18) stress aligning games and songs with specific learning outcomes and assessments, reflect purposeful use, which echoes Nation’s (2007) argument that vocabulary learning should be embedded in broader curricular goals. Similarly, 79% (n = 79/100) (Q19) emphasize the need for training, peer support, and access to resources, aligning with Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural view of collaborative scaffolding. Classroom management also emerged strongly, with 76% (n = 76/100) (Q20) highlighting the necessity of clear routines and behavioral expectations, consistent with Farrell (2015) and Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby’s (2005) advocacy of structured game norms. Furthermore, 77% (n = 77/100) (Q22) value compare song lyrics with standard expressions, supporting Nguyen’s (2021) recommendation of side-by-side analysis. Around two-thirds (67%, n = 67/100) (Q21) stress select age- and culture-appropriate songs, echo Nation and Newton (1997) on contextual clarity in lexical input. Collectively, these findings show pre-service teachers’ tendency towards strategic and student-center approaches.

Open-ended responses further elaborate these preferences. 40% (n = 40) called for more practical training and workshops, consistent with Shulman’s (1987) [38] emphasis on pedagogical content knowledge. About 25% (n = 25) stressed classroom management, while 30% (n = 30)

Another emphasized reflective practice, highlighting that, “We guide pre-service teachers to reflect on why they use a particular song or game, not just how” (P2). Classroom management was also a recur theme, with a teacher educator observing, “We must prepare them with classroom management skills, because games and songs can become chaotic without structure” (P3). These insights suggest that teacher educators play a complementary role by equipping pre-service teachers with both technical strategies and reflective tools, ensuring that the pedagogical use of games and songs is both effective and sustainable.

highlighted access to ready-made lesson plans and adaptable resources, mirrors Brewster *et al.*’s (2002) [4] suggestion of low-tech solutions. Roughly 20% (n = 20) suggested technology integration (e.g., Kahoot, ChatGPT, GarageBand), aligns with Nguyen’s (2021) view of multimodal learning, while another 20% (n = 20) emphasized repeat practice to reduce anxiety and build teaching confidence.

Interview data enriched these findings with concrete tactics. For instance, P1 emphasized the role of ICQs, noting that “clear instructions and checking comprehension help avoid confusion during games”. P2 explained that “demo lessons make me more confident before applying G/S in real classrooms”, a view echo by P5, consistent with Farrell’s (2015) call for peer observation. Several pre-service teachers diversified resources through YouTube, TikTok, or Bamboozle, though P8 remarked, “I always prepare tangible aids in case technology fails”, illustrates Brewster *et al.*’s (2002) [4] low-resource strategies. P4 described differentiate tasks, says that “learners have different needs, so I adapt the same game for different groups”, consistent with Gardner’s (1993) [14] multiple intelligences framework. Similarly, P10 stressed that “short and age-appropriate songs work better for young learners”, aligning with Nation and Newton (1997). Others, such as P9, highlighted the use of group games for quiet students, while many (e.g., P2, P4) stressed repeat teaching practice and exposure to multiple teacher educators, with P2 state, “the more I practice and observe others, the less nervous I feel”, echoing Vygotsky’s (1978) collaborative scaffolding.

Teacher Educators' Suggested Strategies

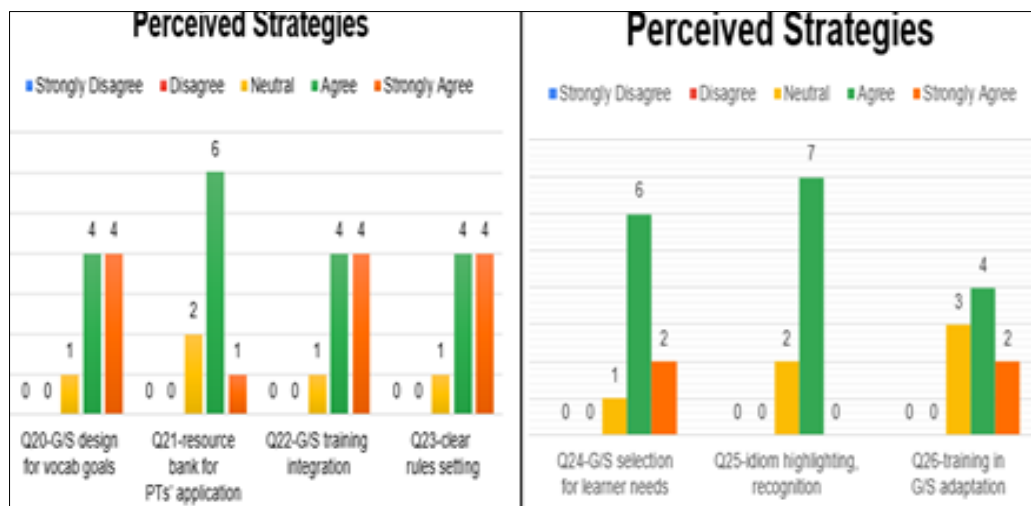


Fig 8: Perceived Strategies in using Games and Songs for English vocabulary

Figure 8 illustrates the perceptions of teacher educators towards strategies of using games and songs in English vocabulary teaching. Specifically, 8 out of 9 participants (89%) emphasized the need to link activities with curriculum goals and ensure they fit within time constraints (Q20), aligns with Nation (2001) who argued that structure integration foster effectiveness. Similarly, 7 out of 9 participants (78%) highlighted the importance of resource banks to support pre-service teachers (Q21), echoes Cheng and Lee (2019) on the necessity of accessible teaching materials. Moreover, most teacher educators (8/9, 89%) favored embedding these methods into training programs (Q22), consistent with Lee (1995) [20] who advocate systematic incorporation for long-termed teacher development. Classroom management strategies (Q23) received unanimous support (8/9, 89%), reinforces Murphey's (1992) [24] point that managing activities effectively reduces classroom anxiety. In contrast, 8 participants (89%) endorsed the use of simple, relevant, and frequent vocabulary (Q24), while idioms and archaic lyrics (7/9, 78%) (Q25) were less favor, reflects Sousa *et al.* (2023) who warned of difficulties in transfer such vocabulary to real-life contexts. Responses (6/9, 67%) to adapting games and songs for different proficiency levels (Q26) were mixed, reflecting uncertainty in applying differentiated strategies. This finding aligns with Cheng and Lee (2019), who emphasized the need for age and level appropriate input, and with Sousa *et al.* (2023) [39], who noted challenges in transferring songs and games effectively across vary learner contexts.

Open-ended responses revealed several strategies that teacher educators considered essential. Four participants (44%) recommended microteaching and repeat classroom practice to strengthen classroom management skills. Three participants (33%) stressed the importance of workshops and professional development programs focused on design adaptable teaching resources, which reflects Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (2005) on the need for structure guidance in games and songs' applications. Two participants (22%) emphasized the importance of setting clear learning goals and maintaining classroom control, while another two (22%) underlined the role of observing model lessons to internalize effective practices. Finally, one participant (11%) pointed to the use of AI and digital technologies as innovate

aids, echoing Hébert & Terzopoulos (2021) [16], who emphasized the positive role of technological tools in supporting learner engagement, and Brewster *et al.* (2002) [4], who underlined the importance of resource diversification in vocabulary teaching.

Interviews further elaborated these practices. Teacher educators often combined theory with practice, requiring pre-service teachers to engage with sample activities before classroom implementation. As one educator explained, "I always let them try out a game or song in a small group before they bring it into a real class, because practice reduces mistakes later" (P1). Another highlighted the need for constructive feedback, notes, "We review lesson plans in advance, then sit together to discuss what works and what does not" (P2). In addition, resources and literature were emphasized as creativity boosters: "I encourage my students to read scholarly sources and adapt materials instead of copying them directly" (P3). Practical advice also centers on classroom realities, such as tailor activities to learners' level ("Always check if the song or game fits the age group", P2) and maintaining interest through variety ("If you only use one type of game, students get bored quickly, so I suggest mixing them up", P1). Time management and contingency planning were equally stress: "I tell them to rehearse instructions, prepare backup activities, and set up the tech early in case something goes wrong" (P3). Collectively, these insights demonstrate that teacher educators integrate theoretical guidance with experiential learning, reflective feedback, and technological preparedness to prepare pre-services for effective use of games and songs in vocabulary teaching.

Implications and Conclusion

Games and songs enhance learning by motivating students, creating enjoyable contexts, and supporting vocabulary retention (Brewster *et al.*, 2002) [4]. Challenges for pre-service teachers mainly involve time management and classroom control, which can be addressed through structured rules, time limits, clear guidance, microteaching, and feedback. Both groups emphasized the need for stronger links between theory and practice. Pre-service teachers recommended observing various educators and joining voluntary clubs for wider perspectives and confidence building. Meanwhile, teacher educators suggested more

practical training, including lesson demonstrations, microteaching, and reflection, to prepare students for real classroom challenges.

This study has certain limitations, particularly in terms of its relatively small sample size at HUFLIT, may not be generalizable to other institutions or regions with different training programs and student backgrounds. The study highlights the perceptions and strategies of both pre-service teachers and teacher educators without drawing comparisons between the two groups. This research utilizes descriptive data expressed in percentages for the survey, without the aid of software for quantitative data analysis.

Despite some limitations, this study could be useful for HUFLIT pre-service teachers and teacher educators in improving classroom practice and training effectiveness. It also highlights the value of hands-on experiences such as microteaching, reflective practice, or volunteering in English clubs to build confidence and practical skills. These insights can also serve as a foundation for future research involving broader participant groups and varied contexts. By focusing on both perceptions and strategies, the study underscores the need for structured pedagogical support within teacher education programs to enable effective and sustainable use of these tools. Further research should develop an experimental research design that provides stronger evidence of the benefits and applications of games and songs. Additionally, further research will compare the similarities and differences between the two groups of participants and design a mixed method with a quantitative model and analysis using a specific quantitative approach to maximize the two groups' perspectives and examine the relationship between games, songs and vocabulary acquisition. By addressing these areas, future studies can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the role of games and songs in EFL classrooms and contribute to both theory and practice in teacher education.

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How to Cite This Article

Diep MC. Using games and songs in EFL vocabulary teaching. *Int J Soc Sci Except Res*. 2026;5(1):86–97. doi:10.54660/IJSSER.2026.5.1.86-97.

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