

# DISEÑO DE UN JUEGO DE MESA PARA MEJORAR LA ADQUISICIÓN DE VOCABULARIO EN ESTUDIANTES DE TERCER GRADO

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## RESUMEN

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar cómo el uso de un juego de mesa co-diseñado y basada en el contexto promueve la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés por parte de los alumnos de tercer grado de la escuela Manuel Antonio Bonilla. El estudio incluyó el diseño de un juego de mesa basado en el contexto y las necesidades de los participantes, su implementación y el análisis de los resultados. El hallazgo general confirma que es de suma importancia que los alumnos de las instituciones públicas de Colombia puedan utilizar los juegos de mesa en las clases de inglés, para proporcionarles una estrategia pedagógica que se adapte a las necesidades de su contexto.

**PALABRAS** *Juegos de mesa, adquisición de vocabulario, inglés como lengua extranjera.*

## DESIGN OF A BOARD GAME TO ENHANCE VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN THIRD GRADERS

### ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explore how the use of a co-designed and context-based board game promotes the acquisition of vocabulary in English by third graders at Manuel Antonio Bonilla School. The study involved a board game design based on the context and needs of the participants, its implementation and analysis of results. The overarching finding confirms that it is of utmost importance that the pupils of public institutions in Colombia can use board games in English classes, to provide them with a pedagogical strategy that adapts to the needs of their context.

**KEYWORDS:** Board games, vocabulary acquisition, ELF.

### INTRODUCTION

Board games are not only focused on fun or used for entertainment, they can also be used for educational purposes. Depending on the objective, board games can be adapted to the needs of a group and can handle any kind of thematic. For that reason, it was chosen to design a board game that promotes the acquisition of English vocabulary, in fact, “Games are important in teaching vocabulary because they highlight the necessary and important words to achieve the objectives of the game” (Ameer, 2016, p. 5).

The above statement is a clear example of what can be obtained by focusing research on vocabulary, especially because vocabulary plays a fundamental role in the acquisition of any language, which is why linguists such as Wilkins (1972) affirm that: “while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (p.112). Languages depend entirely on vocabulary, so it is necessary to focus on this element, especially when working with children, who are at a stage where vocabulary can be acquired in different ways.

Another fundamental aspect to point out, is that context setting was chosen because public primary education institutions in Colombia have two important characteristics. Firstly, “in public schools, students study one hour of English a week in primary school” (Correa & González, 2016, p. 3) Secondly, in most of the cases “teachers are not well versed in either methodology or English language proficiency” (Bastidas & Muñoz, 2011, p.95). These were some of the reasons for choosing to work with this population.

The design and implementation of the board game was developed as a strategy

to help the participants in their English vocabulary acquisition process, because due to the characteristics of their context, it was necessary to find an educational material that could be adapted to their needs.

### **Literature Review**

Third graders at Manuel Antonio Bonilla School have English classes once a week, however, on many occasions this is relegated to other activities, therefore, the amount of exposure to the foreign language is low. Another fundamental aspect that has to be stressed is that the pupils do not have a teacher who has a degree in teaching English, which is a significant problem, because the children do not have the opportunity to explore different methodologies that can only be applied by someone who is trained in EFL.

The above issues led this research to the extent of looking for a strategy that would be useful in such a context, therefore, a board game was designed, based on content-based and CLIL, these approaches were determinant for developing an educational material that would be relevant for the participants.

### **Board games in vocabulary acquisition**

Board games have different functions, these are adapted to the needs of those who require them, therefore, they are a great tool in the acquisition of English vocabulary, especially because it is an activity that motivates and entertains its players (Casas i Faig, 2020) This strategy when used in the English class can generate positive outcomes in the children's performance, since they will be doing an activity that involves playing.

Psychologists such as Vygotsky, affirm that: "play is a purposeful activity for a child" (p.19). This statement is quite interesting, because it builds confidence that playing can indeed be aligned with education, especially when applied to children. For this reason, it was considered to look for a type of play that would work as the strategy needed by the participants to acquire English vocabulary.

The selection of a board game was made not only thinking about its adaptability, but also that it did not depend on technological resources, which tend to be very limited in the public educational institutions of the country. Not only was this one of the reasons, but it must also be added that "Games are important in teaching vocabulary because they highlight the necessary and important words to achieve the objectives of the game" (Ameer, 2016, p. 10).

The vocabulary used in the design of the board game was provided by the participants, who, by means of a questionnaire, indicated their interests, likes and dislikes. This process was conducted based on the contributions of Haixia and Zhaohui (2015), who state that for the acquisition of vocabulary it is indispensable to look for words that children know in their mother tongue, categorize the words and present them in an identifiable context.

### **Content based instruction**

For the design of the board game, the content based approach was used, because its characteristics were aligned with the objectives to be achieved. In fact, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001): “Content-Based Instruction refers to an approach to second language teaching in which teaching is organized around the content or information that students will acquire, rather than around a linguistic or other type of syllabus” (p.204).

The statement offered by the linguists is very valid for this type of activity, because the importance of the board game relies on its content being based on the needs of the participants and on the knowledge of vocabulary that they have in their mother tongue. In addition, the features of the CBI are aligned with what was sought when designing this board game, because they are student-centered.

One of the characteristics of CBI that was adapted to the design of the board game was that the content should be chosen for its relevance to students’ lives, interests, and/or academic goals (Villalobos, 2013) This was crucial in the choice of content for the board game, since it focused on using words that were related to the children’s interests and that they already knew in Spanish.

### **CLIL**

CLIL approach also proved to be quite useful in the design of the board game, especially because of its close association with learning a language through content. It is necessary to point out that some of the most important theorists in regards to CLIL, have stated what the process of vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language should be like:

‘Knowing’ vocabulary is more than just recognizing a word, or knowing how to pronounce it, and it is more than just reproducing a dictionary definition. Getting to really know words is a long- term process. It involves coming across words and phrases in different contexts. (Tanner, van der Es, & Dale, 2011, p. 50).

The above statement is evidence that the process of vocabulary acquisition requires time and constant contact with words, which mean that, this is not a process that can be taken lightly. Therefore, the statements of the theorists were considered, at the time of designing the game a process was conducted in which the participants used the chosen vocabulary in different activities.

## METHODS

The objective of this research project was to explore how the use of a co-designed and context-based board game promotes the acquisition of vocabulary in English by third graders at Manuel Antonio Bonilla School. The design of a board game was chosen because it is considered an educational strategy that allows pupils to establish a relation of vocabulary acquisition in English.

In order to perform this research, a qualitative approach was implemented, because, it is “used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions” (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013, p. 3) This was important because the data collected had a qualitative value that is indicated by the participants' reflections on their experience using the board game.

Fifteen third graders participated in this project, from whom data were collected for the design of the board game through the following instruments:

- Questionnaire 1: This instrument was used to collect data on the students' interests, thus allowing the selection of the vocabulary to be used in the board game.
- Test 1 and Test 2: These instruments were applied in order to identify whether the participants obtained the expected results with respect to the two stages of vocabulary acquisition proposed by Cronbach. Test 1 was administered before the implementation of the board game and Test 2 after, in order to compare the results and determine if there were relevant changes.

## RESULTS

The design process of the board game resulted in a memory game. The game contains 24 cartoons and their corresponding cards. All the elements of the game were based on inputs provided by the participants through data collection and the development of a co-design process. The results obtained are based on the development of test 1 and test 2, in furtherance of the students' answers to questions related to the implementation of the board game.

To analyze the results, they were organized in three groups, according to the number of correct answers that the participants had, the first is between zero and ten correct answers. The second between ten and twenty correct answers. Finally, the third between twenty and thirty-five correct answers. With this process table 1 was obtained.

**Table 1.** Classification of results of the test 1

Number of correct answers	Students	Percent
0-10	3	15%
10-20	5	32%
20-35	7	53%

**Source:** Own elaboration.

As can be seen in Table 1, only seven of the fifteen participants obtained a high score; on the contrary, over 50% of the participants are in the two lower groups. Therefore, it was expected to see that after the implementation of the board game, most of the children's remembered more words, that is, that they improved their results in test 2.

The application of test 2 was performed after the last implementation of the board game, therefore, a slight increase in the positive results of the participants was expected. Again, on this occasion, the same groups were organized with respect to the number of correct answers obtained by the children.

**Table 2.** Classification of results of the test 2

Number of correct answers	Students	Percent
0-10	0	0%
10-20	0	0%
20-35	14	100%

**Source:** Own elaboration.

Another aspect of this research that deserves to be stressed is that in the context in which this study was conducted, there were difficulties in the development of English lessons, which is reflected in the low intensity of the hours in this subject and in the lack

of preparation in English that the teacher has.

Finally, it should be considered that for a future research a training to the English teacher should be carried out, because it is necessary that he/she understands how to implement the board game properly in the classroom. One aspect that should be highlighted with respect to Table 2 is that only the results of 14 participants are shown, that was because participant M1 did not attend the day the test was administered.

The results obtained, shown in Table 2, are evidence that the process conducted with the pupils during the design and implementation of the board game was effective. This is reflected in the fact that all 14 participants reached the highest group, that is, the group in which they obtained between twenty and thirty-five correct answers.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The results obtained in this research show that there is a strong relation between the design and implementation of a board game with respect to vocabulary acquisition. This is due to the fact that the game was designed taking into account the opinions of the participants, as well as respecting important elements of the CLIL and content based instruction approaches.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There are three general conclusions to highlight. Firstly, the study showed that in order to promote the acquisition of vocabulary in English it is necessary to develop a long process that allows obtaining long-term objectives. However, in spite of the short duration of the project, it was evidenced that the use of activities that complemented the board game were fundamental in the achievement of positive results.

Secondly, it was determined that the needs analysis is important to carry out the process of acquiring English vocabulary, because it allowed the participants to make their interests known and link them with the design of the board game, in order for the words used to be known by the children.

Finally, it was established that the memory game is a board game that can be used as a pedagogical strategy that allows the acquisition of English vocabulary. Due to the fact that, the participants were in contact with the game since its creation, and played lottery on two occasions, when analyzing the results, this proved to be positive.



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