

Enhancing EFL vocabulary acquisition: The effectiveness of educaplay

Mejora de la adquisición de vocabulario en EFL: la eficacia de Educaplay

Wilmer Cuenca, Manuel Pila

Abstract

This paper analyzed the interactive and engaging nature of online educational games, which have gained notorious attention as they have become a great ally when learning a new language. This study examined how effective online educational games are regarding the improvement of learning vocabulary when learning a foreign language, focusing on using the Educaplay platform. Therefore, this study explored students' perceptions, measuring vocabulary acquisition, and assessed the influence on motivation and engagement. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was applied to pre- and post-tests, surveys, and focus groups. This study involved two focus groups of Seventh-grade EFL learners: the experimental group, which participated in Educaplay-based vocabulary activities four times a week for eight weeks, and the control group, which followed a traditional vocabulary learning approach. The tests gave quantitative information to measure vocabulary progress, while surveys and group discussions gave descriptive details about students' attitudes and thoughts on using online games for learning new words. The findings will enrich the understanding of how Educaplay, as a digital tools can support vocabulary development and encourage positive learning experiences in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Vocabulary; EFL learning; Educational games; Educaplay.

Wilmer Cuenca

Catholic University of Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador | wilmer.cuenca.79@est.ucacue.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9971-9078>

Manuel Pila

Catholic University of Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador | mpilar@ucacue.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0008-8592-008X>

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Resumen

Este trabajo analizó la naturaleza interactiva y atractiva de los juegos educativos en línea, que han ganado notoria atención al convertirse en un gran aliado a la hora de aprender un nuevo idioma. Este estudio examinó la eficacia de los juegos educativos en línea para mejorar el aprendizaje de vocabulario en una lengua extranjera, centrándose en el uso de la plataforma Educaplay. Por lo tanto, este estudio exploró las percepciones de los estudiantes, midiendo la adquisición de vocabulario, y evaluó la influencia en la motivación y el compromiso. Se aplicó un diseño de métodos mixtos explicativos secuenciales a las pruebas previas y posteriores, las encuestas y los grupos de discusión. En este estudio participaron dos grupos focales de alumnos de séptimo curso de EFL: el grupo experimental, que participó en actividades de vocabulario basadas en Educaplay cuatro veces por semana durante ocho semanas, y el grupo de control, que siguió un enfoque tradicional de aprendizaje de vocabulario. Los tests proporcionaron información cuantitativa para medir el progreso del vocabulario, mientras que las encuestas y las discusiones en grupo ofrecieron detalles descriptivos sobre las actitudes y los pensamientos de los estudiantes respecto al uso de juegos en línea para aprender nuevas palabras. Los resultados enriquecerán la comprensión de cómo Educaplay, como herramienta digital, puede apoyar el desarrollo del vocabulario y fomentar experiencias positivas de aprendizaje en contextos de EFL.

Palabras clave: Vocabulario; Aprendizaje EFL; Juegos educativos; Educaplay.

Introduction

In recent years, education has been greatly influenced by digital tools, especially in the area of language instruction. Nowadays, online educational games are being used as a method to enhance vocabulary learning for EFL students. These games not only motivate and engage students but also provide learners with an interactive and immersive experience, which captures their attention and ease the absorption of new words more effectively, as highlighted by Yeh and Lan (2020). Furthermore, these games create an adaptable setting that supports autonomous learning, a key element when mastering a foreign language, according to Denden and Belkhir (2021).

The Educaplay platform has positioned itself as a tool in this field because of its engaging activities like crossword, puzzles, and word searches, aimed at enhancing language skills effectively. Current studies emphasize that digital games can notably increase acquisition by engaging learners in practical and meaningful tasks (referencing Hassan et al., 2022; Cruz and Arias, 2023).

Despite several research findings emphasizing the benefits of using online educational games for teaching languages successfully in various environments around the globe, the under-implementation of Educaplay in Latin America limits the availability of interactive digital tools that are needed for learning English. The use of online games regularly raises motivation and vocabulary retention through gamification activities. Hence, it provides reasonable and convenient solutions as teachers can modify content according to different levels of proficiency and, accordingly, manipulate content that fits into different levels of proficiency, an adjustment that must be made for EFL learners' specific needs in those settings where platforms like Educaplay may be implemented within educational institutions.

At school settings, platforms like Educaplay generate an unusual and didactic learning environment for EFL learners in the different regions of Ecuador. The current research demonstrates

how Educaplay influences the acquisition of English vocabulary in foreign language learners in the South American educational environment.

This research assessed the effectiveness of online educational games in teaching vocabulary to beginner-level students at Reina Maternal de la Frontera School. The research applied a mixed sequential design with pre- and post-tests for measuring students' knowledge, as well as surveys and focus groups to gather opinions about using Educaplay. It intends to advise people about how these tools impact vocabulary development in a similar context and encourage their effective inclusion in teaching foreign languages.

Research objectives

- To explore the perspectives of EFL learners on the use of Educaplay for learning new vocabulary.
- To measure the impact of Educaplay games on vocabulary acquisition in EFL.
- To evaluate the influence of Educaplay on learners' motivation and engagement.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework The study is grounded in constructivism, as per Vygotsky's theory (1978), where his contribution largely stresses active participation and Real involvement with learning. In such a way this theoretical framework is particularly important as it meets the principles of learning based on educational games in which students gain knowledge through interaction, enquiry and experience, rather than passive memories.

Furthermore, Constructivism emphasizes the importance of social engagement and directed assistance in the process of learning, both of which are essential components of interactive educational tools such as Educaplay. Through interactive digital tools, learners receive comprehensible input in an engaging way, which enhances their motivation and facilitates a deeper understanding of the language. The dynamic nature of educational games enables students to apply newly acquired vocabulary in context, reinforcing their comprehension through direct experience.

According to Deyina (2024),

as Educaplay Learning Media serves as a tool in teaching and learning, its implementation in the classroom encourages active student participation. Teaching by using media is needed in teaching-learning processes to help students become active. Media have important roles in the teaching-learning process. The use of media can help teachers and students to achieve the aims of teaching and learning. Meanwhile, media support teachers' explanations and help students to understand the materials or the lesson. (p. 3)

In this context, the use of Educaplay as an interactive educational platform enhances EFL learners' language acquisition by providing comprehensible input through gamified activities, aligning with the constructivist approach to learning.

Krashen's (1982), Input Hypothesis refers to a concept in language acquisition theory, proposing that individuals understand a new language better when the material they encounter is understandable yet slightly more advanced than their current skill level (referred to as "i + 1"). Krashen emphasizes the importance of exposing learners to language elements that are neither overly complex nor too easy but instead encourage them to progress beyond their existing understanding. Educational games on the internet, like Educaplay offer a way to learn new words in a meaningful context and also help reinforce vocabulary that has been previously taught. This transition from memorization to using words in relevant contexts plays a significant role, in how well learners retain and grasp new vocabulary.

Moreover, Vygotsky (1978), emphasized the role of play in cognitive development, a concept reflected in online educational games. These games contain recreational elements to make learning more comfortable and reduce stress. By integrating play into the educational process, the characteristic motivation stimulates and promotes a deep and lasting learning experience.

In this sense, using Educaplay involves interactive activities in which students engage with vocabulary through gamified dynamics that promote retention and comprehension. Using these educational games, students will actively manipulate and explore new words in an important context, facilitating their ability to understand how they are embedded in broader linguistic structures.

Literature review

This literature review aims to investigate the extent to which online educational games, especially those made with the Educaplay platform, can help English learners acquire more vocabulary. Learning through games is among the various innovative teaching strategies brought about by the growing use of technological devices in most schools. Firstly, English as a foreign language course, where students may have motivational and preservation problems, traditional vocabulary teaching strategies, such as rote or chip techniques, sometimes fail to attract students' attention. Interactive and entertaining resources, such as online educational games, can help solve this problem because they have been shown to improve vocabulary development and increase students' interest (Yeh & Lan, 2020). Educaplay, a platform that allows educators to create interactive game-based activities, is an example of such a tool, as it promotes active learning and participation of EFL learners (Denden & Belkhir, 2021).

Issues/Main Areas of Research

Many researchers have studied aspects of the effectiveness, potential, and limitations of online educational games at increasing vocabulary have been studied by numerous researchers. In this part of the study, this discipline's basic studies were examined, so that a broad understanding of the current state of research could be provided.

One of the most outstanding findings is that online educational games help EFL students increase vocabulary retention and engagement (Chen et al., 2022; Liu & Wang, 2021). Other studies state that learning through games provides instant feedback, motivating students into an interactive environment that facilitates higher attitude towards vocabulary (Alshammari, 2020). On the other hand, other studies show that this tools contribute to learners' autonomy by allowing them to manage their own pace of learning while reinforcing practice (Reinders & Wattana, 2021).

Effectiveness of Online Educational Games

Yeh and Lan (2020), conducted a study to test the impact of online games based on EFL students' noun actions. The experiment was attended by 120 high school students divided into two groups: one using traditional teaching methods and the other using an online game-based platform. The results showed that the students in the group retained 35% more than the traditional group. This study emphasised the role of interactivity and motivation in improving vocabulary. However, the authors noted that technical problems, such as a connection, occasionally disrupted the learning process.

Teaching Methods: this section looks at how vocabulary is presented in EFL classes using educational games and other related technologies. It was testing the influence of various games, such as letter games, matching activities and crosswords, on students and their vocabulary, as well as strategies to be included effectively in the curriculum.

Types of Educational Games: the different game formats provided by websites such as Educaplay, include flashcards, multiple-choice tests, and gap-filling, these games are designed to provide learners with different contexts where they can discover new vocabulary and actively practise it.

Geographical and Contextual Focus: educational settings where the research on game-based vocabulary-skill learning occurred. This section covers the geographic locations of the participants in the research and potential cultural factors which may have mediated the effectiveness of their game-based vocabulary learning compared to traditional methods like rote and direct learning.

On the other hand, with respect to the evaluation of the students' knowledge regarding identification and comprehension of vocabulary items, the play games offer interactive tasks matching words to definitions, multiple-choice questions, and synonyms and antonyms identification. Students scoring higher on these activities demonstrate a solid understanding of the meaning of words and their ability to recognize words within specific phrases and context, which indicates more effective learning compared to traditional methods.

Explanation of Sections/Issues

Vocabulary Recognition

In this part students identified and comprehended vocabulary sent isolated or in sentences. Performing these tasks involved matching words with their definitions, multiple-choice questions, and identifying words' synonyms or antonyms. The higher the score, the better learners understood the word's meaning and its context.

Vocabulary Production

This part focused on the students' ability to actively recall and use vocabulary in written or spoken formats. Activities included sentence completion, short answer questions, and free composition tasks where learners needed to integrate specific vocabulary items. A high score in this section signifies improved productive vocabulary skills.

Challenges and Limitations

Although the advantages of online educational games are well-documented, studies have also pointed out challenges. For example, Denden and Belkhir (2021), discovered that poorly designed games with unclear goals or irrelevant content can lead to frustration and disengagement among learners. Furthermore, the digital divide remains a barrier, since not all students have access to the necessary devices or reliable internet connections which is crucial to fully benefit from these tools.

Methodology

This study adopted a combined method, merging quantitative and qualitative data to examine the impact of Educaplay on vocabulary retention. The quantitative section assessed students' pre- and post-intervention vocabulary performance using standardized tests. In contrast, the qualitative element investigated learners' experiences and views through semi-structured interviews. Fusing the two perspectives facilitated a more comprehensive interpretation of the results.

Tabla 1. Main features of Educaplay

Main features of Educaplay	
Types Installation	Web-based, accessible from browsers on computers and mobile devices
Educational Model	Universal All
No. of learners.	One-hundred users or more
Time	No expiry date
Usability	Quick and easy, no expert programming
flexibility	Adaptability Customizable to cater to particular student requirements regarding individuals, materials, courses, and teaching methods

Source: own elaboration.

Participants

The selection method for this research was convenience sampling, which involves selecting participants. The study was include 20 A2-level EFL learners from Reina Maternal de la Frontera School, aged between 11 and 12 years old. Participants will be separated into two categories: the control category and the experimental category. The experimental category will engage in vocabulary-focused activities using the Educaplay platform, while the control group will follow traditional vocabulary exercises. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and both parental and learners' consent will be obtained before the research.

Instruments

A Diagnostic Test

The first instrument is a vocabulary test specifically designed for this study using the Educaplay platform. Educaplay is a web-based educational tool that includes a variety of interactive games and activities aimed at enhancing language skills. In this research, the test instrument was focus on evaluating the learners' vocabulary knowledge before and after participating in Educaplay activities.

The test will include several activities on Educaplay as follows:

Activity 1: matching Words with Pictures

Learners will be presented with a series of pictures. They will have to match each picture with the right word from a word list.

Activity 2: fill-in-the-Blank Exercises

In this activity, sentences with blank spaces will be displayed. Learners must select the appropriate word from multiple choices to complete the sentence.

Activity 3: word Search Games

A word search game where learners search for target vocabulary words hidden in a grid.

Activity 4: crossword Puzzles

A crossword puzzle with clues related to target vocabulary words. Students must fill in the correct words.

This test instrument was selected due to the versatility of the Educaplay platform in offering various interactive and gamified activities that effectively engage students and facilitate vocabulary acquisition. The test was administered both in a pre-test and post-test format.

A Survey

The second instrument is a questionnaire for the cross-sectional method. This survey will collect data about the learners' experiences, opinions, and attitudes toward using the Educaplay platform to improve their vocabulary skills.

The questionnaire will include two types of items:

Nominal items: Questions about age, level of proficiency, frequency of platform use, etc.
Conventional items: Questions that use Likert-scale responses to measure the students' perceptions, such as: Games on Educaplay make learning new words interesting and fun. The data collected by the study will help in understanding the learners' overall engagement and satisfaction for students using education vocabulary enhancement.

A Focus Group

The third method is a focus group discussion, in which the group of students from the experimental group will be invited to share experiences and impressions of using the Educaplay platform. This method is designed to gather qualitative insights into their perspectives, feelings, and attitudes regarding the platform's impact on the platforms on their vocabulary development.

Procedure

This research will be carried out in two phases.

In the first phase, several preparatory steps will be carried out. First week: The required authorizations will be sought from the relevant authorities and institutions to ensure that the study runs smoothly. At the same time, Educaplay resources will be carefully chosen, selecting interactive vocabulary games appropriate to the learners' level of ability.

Week 2: the procedure for gaining permission from the students will be carried out, ensuring that ethical standards are respected and that participants fully understand the purpose and extent of the research.

Days 3 and 4: a diagnostic test will be conducted to measure learners' initial vocabulary proficiency. In addition, a list of key terms will be presented to define a framework for the intervention. Week 5: this will be concerned with developing and verifying the survey instruments, including questionnaires and focus group questions. This will ensure that the data collection instruments are reliable and accurately assess the expected results.

The second phase involves the intervention, during of the days 6 and 7: Students will take part in the activities chosen by Educaplay, encouraging vocabulary elicitation through playful and interactive activities. At the end of the intervention, during week 7, a post-intervention test will be conducted to assess pupils' progress and evaluate the success of the intervention. Finally, reserved for data analysis, combining both qualitative and quantitative.

methods. This step will provide a comprehensive understanding of the results, highlighting any improvements in vocabulary acquisition and exploring students' perceptions of the learning process.

Tabla 1. Time line

Activity	Time (months)						
	December			January			
	Week 1	Week 2	W3 – W4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Permissions							
Choose materials for Educaplay							
Phase 1. Get the students' consent							
Apply Diagnostic Test							
Matching words							
Post-test							
Design and validate the instruments for the survey and focus group							
Phase 2. Intervention							
Data Analysis qualitative and quantitative							

Source: own elaboration.

Analysis

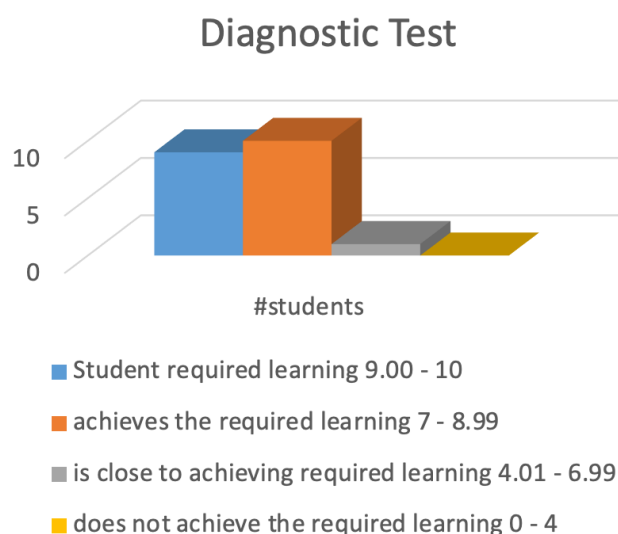
In this mixed research the content analysis is based on the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. Thus “The instruments used, based on qualitative and quantitative logics, such as surveys and interviews, provided us with valuable data of different kinds. quantitative logics, such as surveys and interviews, provided us with valuable data of a different nature” (Obez, et al., 2018, p. 590). In addition, data collection was based on empirical methods such as interview, survey, etc. that helped me to support this research work and then the work of variables to support vocabulary learning through the Educaplay platform.

Results

The study employed a diagnostic test to assess the effectiveness of Educaplay in enhancing EFL vocabulary acquisition among high school students. Twenty students took part in the examination, which was designed to assess their involvement with the platform.

According to the results of the diagnostic test, which assessed vocabulary and grammar acquisition in English through the Educaplay platform, indicate an overall positive performance among the 20 students evaluated. A total of 9 students (45%) demonstrated full mastery of the required learning outcomes, scoring between 9.00 and 10, while 10 students (50%) achieved the expected learning outcomes with scores ranging from 7 to 8.99. Additionally, 1 student (5%) was close to achieving the required learning, scoring between 4.01 and 6.99. Notably, no students were in the lowest performance range (0 - 4).

Figure 1. Results of the diagnostic test.



Source: own elaboration.

Learning and engagement on the Educaplay platform

Regarding perceptions of students' learning and engagement on the Educaplay platform were assessed through a diagnostic test focused on vocabulary and grammar acquisition. The results showed a generally positive performance, with most students achieving or nearing the required learning outcomes. (See table 2)

Table 2. Participants' learning and engagement on the Educaplay platform results

Aspects observed	Mean Week 1	Mean Week 8	SD Week 1	SD Week 8	Value	Effect size
Understands and acquires better vocabulary	1.39	2.43	0.50	0.50	6.9	2.07
Interacts on the Educaplay platform	1.39	2.43	0.50	0.50	6.9	2.07
Improves academic performance	1.39	2.43	0.50	0.50	6.9	2.07
Completes activities on time	1.39	2.43	0.50	0.50	6.9	2.07
Solves vocabulary exercises correctly	1.39	2.43	0.50	0.50	6.9	2.07
Develops activities collaboratively	1.39	2.43	0.50	0.50	6.9	2.07

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2 presents the participants' engagement and performance over eight weeks using Educaplay. The findings reveal significant improvements across all measured aspects, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and platform interaction.

Students demonstrated notable progress in understanding and applying new vocabulary, with scores increasing from 1.39 during Week 1 it was at 2. 43 in Week 6 ($p = 6.9$, $d = 2.07$). Furthermore, improvements were observed in both academic success and platform usability.

Motivation, timely task completion, and accuracy in vocabulary exercises also improved consistently, with mean scores rising from 1.39 to 2.43 ($p = 6.9$). Participation in structured activities and teamwork followed a similar trend, reinforcing the platform's effectiveness in fostering engagement and vocabulary learning.

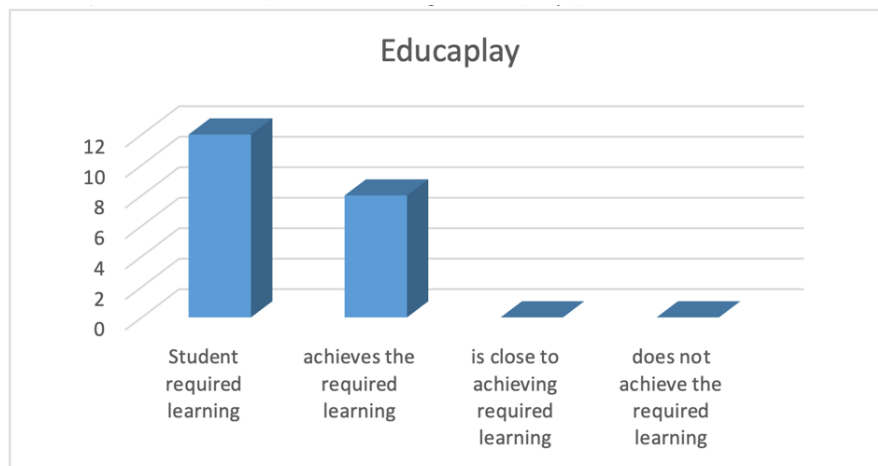
Diagnostic test final using Educaplay platform.

Once the initial diagnosis had been made, the sequence of tasks was implemented through the Educaplay platform to assist with the exercises we developed as English teachers, aimed at enhancing the students' vocabulary.

Next in this part of the work, I proceed to corroborate the system of didactic activities that provided greater effectiveness, so that the characteristics are exemplified predominantly in the

application. On the other hand, the students received suggestions and ideas which led to a significantly enhancement on their progress (Refer to figure 2)-

Figure 2. Results post-test using Educaplay platform.



Source: own elaboration.

The results demonstrate that the use of the Educaplay platform was highly effective in enhancing students' vocabulary and grammar acquisition. A significant majority of students performed well, with 12 achieving full mastery (9.00 - 10) and 9 successfully reaching the required learning level (7.00 - 8.99). Only one student was close to achieving the required learning, and none fell into the lowest category. The test outcomes showed increases in students' vocabulary acquisition and supporting their overall language development. The platform proved to be a valuable tool in fostering effective learning experiences.

Discussion

The study explored how Educaplay supports EFL learners in enhancing their vocabulary acquisition. It combines qualitative and quantitative methods to assess students' perceptions results in improvement vocabulary, and engagement. The findings are reliable evidence that Educaplay, as an interactive learning tool positively influence vocabulary development, demonstrating the importance of digital resources in the language teaching process. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these tools depends on several factors such as internet access, teacher guidance and motivation, and curriculum integration. Furthermore, the specific type of game, embracing options such as flashcards, word searches, and quizzes, is another key factor that contributes to student motivation, engagement, and retention of the vocabulary. The findings in this research give strong evidence that the incorporation of the Educaplay platform as an interactive learning tool has a positive impact on the students' vocabulary development, reflecting the value of digital resources in vocabulary learning. Implementing Educaplay resulted in better vocabulary enhancement of the learners. Learning was more engaging and motivating as the platform promoted active participation due to its interactive characteristics. This still corresponds to earlier readings that shed light

on how games help the process of acquiring the language (Zhang & Lin, 2021). As well, the effectiveness of the platform was also evidenced in the students' final grades, where 50% of the students mastered the required vocabulary (with grades between 9-10), while the remaining 50% achieved the expected learning outcomes (with grades between 7-8.99). In addition, learning by doing is strengthened by repetition and game-based activities, which enhances vocabulary assimilation.

The advantages of interactive activities in the learning experience and increased learner engagement are highlighted, making it possible to establish the relevance of digital resources in vocabulary enhancement. In addition, an essential understanding of the linguistic elements assessed is recommended for all participants, underlining the importance of having a firm foundation in language proficiency to optimize the benefits of these technological tools. These results highlight the importance of applying specific reinforcement for the student who has not reached the required learning outcomes, thus ensuring a more comprehensive development of English language skills. Furthermore, Educaplay effectiveness is reflected in the leaderboard results, where multiple students achieved perfect indicators in a very short times, demonstrating both its effectiveness and content acquisition. In addition, several participants obtained high scores after engaging with the platform, indicating that Educaplay accommodates different learning paces. Nevertheless, variations in individual performance suggest that continuous teacher support remains essential to ensure all learners maximize their vocabulary acquisition.

Although digital platforms such as Educaplay significant enhancements in vocabulary acquisition, teacher guidance remains important. The provision of contextual explanations and the encouragement ongoing engagement are crucial for maximizing the benefits of gamified learning. These findings are based on previous research, which emphasizes the role of interactive digital tools in fostering vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure, contextualized learning, and immediate feedback (Schmitt, 2008; Webb & Nation, 2017).

Conclusion

The reviewed studies emphasize both the advantages and disadvantages of online educational games for fostering the acquisition of new vocabulary. Although they have been shown to improve retention, motivation, and engagement, issues such as accessibility, game design, and potential alarming need to be addressed to optimize their effectiveness. Future research should focus on developing inclusive, well-structured games that meet the needs of different learner.

Platforms such as Educaplay offer games like word searches, crossword puzzles, and flash-cards, which promote active engagement and help reinforce knowledge. These activities encourage students to interact more fully with new expressions and their definitions, creating a dynamic and entertaining learning environment.

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Authors

Wilmer Cuenca. Wilmer Cuenca. Born in Loja, Ecuador, the author has a degree in pedagogy of national and foreign languages. He is a teacher at the Unidad Educativa Reina Maternal de la Frontera, Zapotillo.

Manuel Pila. Manuel Pila. Born in Havana City, Cuba, the author has a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Manuel has been coordinator of English department and mostly professor at the Language Center at Catholic University of Cuenca.

Declaration

Conflict of interest

We have no conflict of interest to declare.

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