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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FROM WORD GAPS TO WORD MASTERY: ENHANCING VOCABULARY PROFICIENCY THROUGH VOCABINGO AND SCRAVOCA PLAY-BASED INNOVATIONS

RECHEL M. MAMAUAG
Affiliation: Bigain Integrated School
Corresponding Author's Email Add: rechel.mamauag003@deped.gov.ph

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ABSTRACT

This action research aimed to assess the vocabulary proficiency of Junior High School learners at Bigain Integrated School during SY 2025–2026, identify factors affecting vocabulary development, and determine the effectiveness of play-based innovations in addressing identified gaps. A quantitative one-group pretest-posttest design with a descriptive approach was employed involving 336 learners from Grades 7–10 using complete enumeration. Data gathered through pre- and post-vocabulary tests, survey questionnaires, unstructured interviews, and observations were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and rankings. Pretest results showed 129 (38.39%) non-vocabulary users, 78 (23.21%) limited, 81 (24.11%) developing, 41 (12.20%) proficient, and 19 (5.65%) advanced vocabulary users. Key factors affecting vocabulary growth included lack of motivation, multiple word meanings, and insufficient reinforcement. Following the implementation of From Word Gaps to Word Mastery, incorporating VocaBingo and ScraVoca innovations, posttest results revealed a significant positive shift: non-vocabulary users decreased to 31 (9.23%), limited to 73 (21.73%), and developing to 60 (17.86%), while proficient users increased to 63 (18.75%) and advanced users to 113 (33.63%). Findings indicate marked

proficiency gains following the intervention. The study recommends sustained integration of play-based vocabulary activities across classroom, home, and community learning environments.

Keywords: *Vocabulary proficiency, Play-based innovations, Gamified instruction, Literacy development, Community-based education*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is central to language learning and serves as the foundation of meaningful communication. It enables learners to articulate ideas, comprehend new concepts, and participate actively in both academic and real-life contexts. A strong vocabulary also strengthens listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, allowing students to communicate with clarity, confidence, and creativity. Beyond comprehension, it fosters critical thinking and contributes significantly to success across all subject areas.

UNESCO (2022) underscored that literacy and lifelong learning are global imperatives essential for empowering individuals and fostering meaningful participation in society. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd, n.d.) continues to strengthen literacy through the Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa (3Bs) initiative, while Secretary Sonny Angara (2023) emphasized reading as a vital skill for lifelong learning. This national vision is supported by Republic Act No. 10533 (2013), DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2023 introducing the National Learning Recovery Program (2023), and DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024 implementing the MATATAG Curriculum, which collectively mandate responsive, 21st-century strategies for vocabulary enrichment.

Cruz (2016) emphasized that vocabulary knowledge is essential for Filipino high school students to meet DepEd standards and cope with increasing curricular demands. However, limited exposure and lack of engaging learning opportunities continued to hinder learners'

fluency, highlighting the need for innovative, learner-centered strategies. Parsons (2016) noted that word games stimulate phonological and semantic processing essential for the retention and expansion of vocabulary, while fostering collaboration, critical thinking, and sustained motivation. Similarly, Lastiri (2023) pointed out that strengthening vocabulary is a simple yet transformative way to enrich one's life, enhancing communication, writing, and comprehension vital for academic achievement and meaningful social interaction. Integrating interactive game mechanics into daily instruction creates immersive learning experiences that reduce language anxiety and accelerate word acquisition.

Drawing from these insights, the researcher implemented collaborative, play-based vocabulary innovations to enhance learners' vocabulary proficiency at Bigain Integrated School. This action research assessed learners' baseline vocabulary proficiency, identified factors affecting vocabulary development, and implemented engaging VocaBingo and ScraVoca innovations to address identified vocabulary gaps. Furthermore, this study established a community-driven framework wherein educators, parents, barangay officials, and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders actively partnered to enrich students' vocabulary through play, social interaction, and language immersion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Proficiency in vocabulary is fundamental for Filipino high school learners aiming to satisfy curriculum benchmarks and manage academic rigor (Cruz, 2016). Nevertheless, traditional deficits in exposure and interactive instruction frequently impede language fluency, underscoring the necessity of modern, student-focused approaches (Cruz, 2016). To address this, Parsons (2016) highlighted that word-based games activate essential phonological and semantic pathways that enhance lexical retention and growth, all while encouraging teamwork, analytical reasoning, and learner engagement. In a related vein, Lastiri (2023) argued that expanding one's lexicon yields far-reaching benefits—sharpening

the expressive and receptive skills indispensable for scholastic excellence and social connection. Embedding gamified elements into regular lessons therefore establishes an engaging environment that lowers communicative apprehension while expediting language mastery.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research aimed to enhance the vocabulary proficiency of Junior High School students at Bigain Integrated School during School Year 2025–2026 through play-based innovations. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What was the baseline vocabulary level of the students prior to the implementation of the intervention?
2. What were the factors affecting the vocabulary skills of Junior High School students at Bigain Integrated School during School Year 2025–2026?
3. What play-based innovations were implemented to address the identified vocabulary gaps?
4. What was the vocabulary level of the students after the implementation of the play-based innovations?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative one-group pretest-posttest design, complemented by a descriptive approach. The descriptive method was used to identify the factors affecting the students' vocabulary skills, while the pretest-posttest design was used to determine changes in vocabulary proficiency before and after the implementation of the play-based innovations.

Participants and/or Other Sources of Data and Information

The participants were 336 Junior High School students of Bigain Integrated School, S.Y. 2025–2026, representing Grades 7–10. Data were gathered primarily through pre-test and post-test assessments and a student survey, supplemented by unstructured interviews and classroom observations to provide broader insights into factors influencing vocabulary development.

Data Gathering Method

The study employed quantitative pre-test and post-test measures to determine changes in learners' vocabulary proficiency. A survey questionnaire was also administered to identify key factors affecting vocabulary development. The gathered data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and ranking to provide a basis for planning and implementing appropriate interventions.

Ethical Issues

The researcher ensured the confidentiality and privacy of all respondents' information throughout the study. All sources were properly cited, and only the actual data gathered from the survey were reported and presented.

FINDINGS

Graph 1. Baseline Vocabulary Proficiency of JHS Students



DETAILED GRADE-LEVEL BREAKDOWN (PRE-TEST)

Grade Level	Non-Vocabulary Users		Limited Vocabulary Users		Developing Vocabulary Users		Proficient Vocabulary Users		Advanced Vocabulary Users	
	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%
Grade 7	43	12.80%	24	7.14%	26	7.74%	17	5.06%	1	0.30%
Grade 8	32	9.52%	19	5.65%	17	5.06%	9	2.68%	9	2.68%
Grade 9	23	6.85%	15	4.46%	10	2.98%	4	1.19%	5	1.49%
Grade 10	31	9.23%	23	6.85%	23	6.85%	11	3.27%	4	1.19%
Total	129/336	38.39%	81/336	24.11%	76/336	22.62%	41/336	12.20%	19/336	5.65%

Graph 1 presents the baseline vocabulary level of Grades 7 to 10 students of Bigain Integrated School for S.Y. 2025–2026 through a pre-test. Out of 336 students, the largest group consisting of 129 learners (38.39%) were identified as *Non-Vocabulary Users*, underscoring a critical need for targeted remedial interventions. This is followed by 81 students (24.11%) classified as *Developing Vocabulary Users* and 76 students (22.62%) under *Limited Vocabulary Users*, who continue to struggle with using new words accurately in oral and written communication. Conversely, only 41 students (12.20%) were categorized as *Proficient*, while a mere 19 students (5.65%) reached the *Advanced* level.

Altogether, these findings highlight the importance of implementing engaging and innovative learning interventions to enhance vocabulary acquisition, retention, and usage. According to Cruz (2016), vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in the academic success of Filipino high school students, as it enables them to meet the Department of Education's learning competencies and manage the increasing intellectual demands of reading and communication tasks. Thus, strengthening learners' vocabulary proficiency through engaging and purposeful interventions is essential to improving their overall academic performance and communication skills. The results also provide a clear baseline for assessing the effectiveness of the interventions implemented in the succeeding phases of the study. These baseline findings further emphasize the need for consistent, learner-centered, and meaningful vocabulary activities that address identified gaps in proficiency.

Table 1. Factors that Affect the Vocabulary Skills of JHS Students

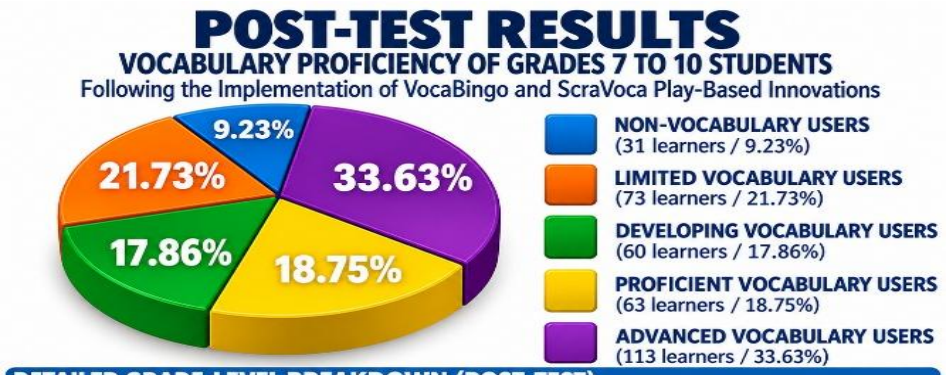
Factors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1. Students do not regularly review and revise learned vocabulary.	209	62.20%	4
2. Students have a lack of motivation or interest in expanding vocabulary.	278	82.74%	1
3. Students do not seek feedback or advice from peers, teachers, or language professionals.	133	39.58%	7

4. Students are confused because many words have multiple definitions.	266	79.17%	2
5. Students are not setting specific and achievable vocabulary goals.	196	58.33%	5
6. Students do not incorporate vocabulary practice into daily routines or activities, such as word games.	242	72.02%	3
7. Students are not actively listening to and noting unfamiliar words encountered in conversations or media.	187	55.65%	6

Table 1 highlights the main challenges affecting the vocabulary skills of Junior High School students at Bigain Integrated School. The most critical issue is the lack of motivation or interest in expanding vocabulary, reported by 82.74% of respondents, underscoring the importance of fostering student engagement. Confusion due to multiple word definitions (79.17%) further complicates comprehension, while the absence of daily vocabulary practice (72.02%) and irregular review of learned words (62.20%) reveal gaps in reinforcement strategies. Moreover, the lack of specific vocabulary goals (58.33%), limited active listening to unfamiliar words (55.65%), and insufficient feedback-seeking (39.58%) suggest weaknesses in self-directed and collaborative learning.

Similarly, Lastiri (2023) pointed out that strengthening vocabulary is a simple yet transformative way to enrich one's life, enhancing communication, writing, and comprehension—skills vital for academic achievement, lifelong learning, and meaningful social interaction. This theoretical foundation affirms that vocabulary mastery is a broader educational priority essential for cultivating linguistic proficiency, critical thinking, and effective participation in society. These findings indicate that vocabulary difficulties are influenced not only by learners' existing knowledge but also by their motivation, practice habits, and learning strategies.

Graph 2. Endline Vocabulary Proficiency of JHS Students



DETAILED GRADE-LEVEL BREAKDOWN (POST-TEST)

Grade Level	Non-Vocabulary Users		Limited Vocabulary Users		Developing Vocabulary Users		Proficient Vocabulary Users		Advanced Vocabulary Users	
	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%	No. of Learners	%
Grade 7	12	3.57%	22	6.55%	27	8.04%	19	5.65%	32	9.52%
Grade 8	7	2.06%	12	3.57%	16	4.76%	16	4.76%	35	10.42%
Grade 9	8	2.38%	10	2.98%	12	3.57%	8	2.38%	18	5.36%
Grade 10	4	1.19%	16	4.76%	18	5.36%	26	7.74%	28	8.33%
Total	31/336	9.23%	60/336	21.73%	73/336	17.86%	63/336	18.75%	113/336	33.63%

Graph 2 presents the post-test results on the vocabulary proficiency of Grades 7 to 10 students following the implementation of VocaBingo and ScraVoca play-based innovations. The data reveal a marked positive shift across all categories, with the number of *Non-Vocabulary Users* significantly dropping to 31 learners (9.23%), while *Limited* and *Developing Vocabulary Users* decreased to 73 (21.73%) and 60 (17.86%), respectively. Conversely, substantial gains were recorded in the higher proficiency levels, as *Proficient Users* increased to 63 learners (18.75%) and *Advanced Users* surged to 113 learners (33.63%), now comprising the largest segment of the student population.

These findings demonstrate the remarkable effectiveness of the play-based innovations in bridging vocabulary gaps, fostering higher retention, and elevating overall language competence among learners. This positive shift aligns with the findings of Parsons (2016), who noted that engaging word games stimulate key phonological and semantic processing necessary for vocabulary expansion. By creating an enjoyable learning environment, the innovation successfully encouraged active participation, allowing students to experiment with new words, build language confidence, and achieve higher proficiency levels. Furthermore, the sharp rise in Advanced Users underscores how interactive gameplay transforms passive word recognition into active, meaningful application. Ultimately, incorporating VocaBingo and

ScraVoca into daily instruction offers a sustainable, highly effective approach to boosting student engagement and accelerating language mastery.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The baseline vocabulary assessment revealed that most students were classified as Non-Vocabulary Users, while only a small number reached the Advanced level, indicating substantial gaps in vocabulary proficiency among the learners.

2. The study identified low motivation, confusion with multiple word meanings, and limited opportunities for daily practice as the most significant factors affecting learners' vocabulary development.

3. The implementation of the play-based innovations, VocaBingo and ScraVoca, resulted in an increase in the number of learners who attained higher vocabulary proficiency levels and a decrease in those at the lowest level.

4. The overall improvement in learners' vocabulary proficiency indicates that VocaBingo and ScraVoca are effective, engaging, and practical play-based interventions for strengthening vocabulary acquisition, retention, and meaningful word use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Sustain and integrate play-based innovations such as VocaBingo and ScraVoca into the regular curriculum to maintain learner engagement and reinforce vocabulary acquisition. Teachers may regularly incorporate these activities into appropriate lessons and provide varied game-based tasks to sustain learners' interest and participation.

2. Establish a structured vocabulary program with daily practice, clear goals, and feedback to address motivation and reinforcement gaps. Regular monitoring of learners' vocabulary progress should also be conducted to identify areas for improvement and provide timely support.

3. Strengthen community and stakeholder involvement—teachers, parents, and local leaders—to extend vocabulary learning beyond the classroom. Collaborative efforts may provide learners with additional opportunities to encounter, practice, and use new words in meaningful real-life contexts.

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