

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a brief overview of several theories that underpin the research. The theories concern the integration of Baamboozle into teaching vocabulary to EFL young learners.

A. Theoretical Framework

1. Constructivist Learning Theory

The Baamboozle game is an interactive game-based learning tool that supports learners in constructing vocabulary knowledge meaningfully. This aligns well with the constructivist learning theory, rooted in Piaget's (1964) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories, which emphasise that learners build knowledge through active engagement and interaction. According to constructivism, learning happens when learners act upon their environment and experiences (Thomas et al., 2014). Studies have shown that game-based platforms, including Baamboozle, encourage students to discuss answers, justify choices, and negotiate meaning, activities that align with constructivist learning processes (Arini & Suwarso, 2024; Nandhini & Rasyidah, 2024). Baamboozle, by allowing students to participate in team-based vocabulary games, offers a space where they can interact, explore, and respond to challenges in real-time.

Furthermore, Mann & MacLeod, (2015) stated that constructivists believe learning occurs when learners actively construct meaning based on their prior knowledge and experiences. Research also shows that Baamboozle promotes recall, prediction, and meaning-making during gameplay, giving learners opportunities to link new vocabulary to what they already know (Arini & Suwarso, 2024; W. Wulandari et al., 2024). Rather than simply receiving information, learners are invited to engage with vocabulary tasks, solve problems, and learn collaboratively.

In a constructivist classroom, the teacher plays the role of a facilitator rather than the central source of knowledge (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Efgivia et al., 2021). Because technology alone does not improve skills, its effectiveness depends on how the teacher designs and facilitates the learning activities. Baamboozle supports this

shift by enabling students to take ownership of their learning while the teacher guides and observes as students engage in interactive tasks (Muhajirin et al., 2022; Winaningsih et al., 2022). Through this process, learners do not just memorise vocabulary but also construct and reinforce it in meaningful, engaging contexts as constructivist theory suggests.

2. Game-Based Learning as a Supportive Tool in Vocabulary Teaching

a. The Concept of Game-Based Learning (GBL)

Game-based learning (GBL) is an innovative instructional approach that not only enhances learners' motivation but also increases their emotional engagement and enjoyment in the learning process (Hart et al., 2020) and cognitive development through immersive activities in early childhood, undergrad, and science contexts (Alotaibi, 2024; Fiqriah et al., 2025; Thi, 2025). This idea aligns with Prensky's (2001) argument that making mistakes, engaging in trial and error, and overcoming challenges are effective learning strategies because they stimulate persistence and active problem-solving, a principle validated by recent empirical work showing GBL boosts behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement while fostering growth mindsets and collaboration (Raharjo et al., 2024; Thi, 2025).

According to Tang et al. (2009), game-based learning refers to an educational approach that utilises computer games or educational software with embedded game elements to facilitate meaningful learning experiences. It integrates various digital tools to promote learning through interactive, game-like environments, supporting 21st-century skills in diverse settings like primary and higher education (Fiqriah et al., 2025; Raziana & Wibawanto, 2025).

Gamification, also known as GBL, involves the incorporation of specific game elements such as mechanics, dynamics, and emotional responses into non-game contexts, like education, to increase learner engagement and motivation (Robson et al., 2015), where GBL excels in stable cognitive gains and multi-domain development per recent syntheses (Alotaibi, 2024; Jihadillah, 2025). These elements are especially valuable when applied to

activities learners might normally find uninteresting or repetitive (Plass et al., 2015; Trybus, 2015), with points/badges elevating enjoyment and participation in digital-age learning (Meylani, 2025; Thi, 2025).

However, GBL is not limited to simply playing games for entertainment. As emphasised by Pho and Dinscore (2015) and Kim (2015), effective game-based instruction should be carefully designed to introduce academic content gradually, along with clear rules, feedback mechanisms, and consequences, aligning with 2025 findings on structured activities for higher-order thinking and confidence (Raharjo et al., 2024; Thi, 2025). Moreover, GBL can foster not only cognitive development but also soft skills and psychomotor competencies, making it a powerful pedagogical tool, especially in language and vocabulary learning, with proven increases in interest and active participation across K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) levels (Blumberg et al., 2024; Fiqriah et al., 2025).

b. The Features of Baamboozle Game

Baamboozle is an online game-based platform specifically designed for educational use. It offers accessible and enjoyable learning activities that allow teachers to reinforce key concepts while promoting active participation and collaboration in classroom settings (Puspita & Syahria, 2023; Qureshi & Kathoon, 2023). As a flexible teaching tool, Baamboozle enables teachers to create and customise games based on their lesson materials and the learning preferences of their students (Rohmah, 2024).

Once a game is created, teachers can choose to make it public or keep it private. This flexibility supports independent and collaborative learning: learners or other teachers can access a variety of games on different topics, and students may even play the games outside class hours, with or without teacher guidance (Fitriani et al., 2025). This feature promotes learner autonomy and extends vocabulary practice beyond the classroom environment (Jihadillah, 2025; Raharjo et al., 2024).

Unlike many online platforms that require individual devices, Baamboozle is designed to be played collectively with just one device, making it ideal for

classroom use with limited technology access (Alfiah & Sholihah, 2025; Hasanah et al., 2025). Its interactive format, often involving team-based play and visual cues, helps sustain students' focus and encourages cooperative learning. These qualities position Baamboozle as an effective tool to support vocabulary development through engaging, game-based activities (Alfiah & Sholihah, 2025; Fitriani et al., 2025).

c. The Use of Baamboozle in Classroom Vocabulary Activities

Baamboozle serves as a practical tool in vocabulary instruction by integrating game-based learning with interactive activities that support vocabulary acquisition. Through Baamboozle, learners can engage in various vocabulary tasks such as matching words to definitions, identifying synonyms and antonyms, sentence completion, and word categorisation (Puspita & Syahria, 2023; Qureshi & Khaton, 2023). These tasks align with key vocabulary learning strategies, including word recognition, repetition, and contextual learning (Nation, 2013).

In classroom settings, Baamboozle enables cooperative learning by allowing teachers to organise students into teams, fostering discussion and collaboration before selecting an answer. This encourages learners to actively engage with new vocabulary and construct meaning through social interaction, which is an essential principle of constructivist learning theory (Bada & Olusegun, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, its team-based format supports the idea that learning occurs more effectively when learners are actively involved rather than passively receiving information (Suhendi, 2018).

Another benefit of Baamboozle is its adaptability for differentiated instruction. Teachers can tailor game content to suit varying student proficiency levels, ensuring inclusive participation and scaffolding vocabulary learning (Rohmah, 2024). Baamboozle also offers immediate feedback after each question, allowing learners to reflect, self-correct, and reinforce their understanding (Kim, 2015; Pho & Dinscore, 2015). This feedback loop supports metacognitive awareness and deeper vocabulary processing.

The platform's multimodal features, such as visual cues and interactive elements, are especially beneficial for young EFL learners, as they help form associations between words and meanings through images or contextual use (Plass et al., 2015). These features cater to different learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic), making vocabulary learning more accessible and enjoyable.

When regularly integrated into vocabulary lessons, Baamboozle creates a low-stress and fun learning environment. Learners view vocabulary practice as a game rather than a task, increasing motivation and participation (Hart et al., 2020). This not only enhances vocabulary retention but also encourages a more positive attitude toward learning English.

3. Teaching and Assessing Vocabulary to Young Learners

Teaching vocabulary to young learners is a crucial foundational step in language acquisition, as vocabulary serves as the building blocks for developing all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Machfudi & Afidah, 2022). Young learners, typically children in elementary or early secondary school, are in a critical period of cognitive and linguistic development, making it essential to provide age-appropriate and engaging vocabulary instruction.

In the context of this study, an understanding of how vocabulary is taught and assessed is highly relevant because learners' progress was measured through vocabulary-based pre-tests and post-tests during the action research cycles. Therefore, this subsection provides the theoretical basis for selecting assessment criteria and interpreting learners' vocabulary development throughout the implementation of Baamboozle.

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Hatch & Brown (1995) defined vocabulary as the words used by speakers of a language to communicate meaning. Anderson & Nagy (1993) added that vocabulary consists of a set of words, including proper names, idioms, and compound words, whose meanings are not always obvious from their individual parts. However, teaching vocabulary to young learners goes beyond these definitions; it requires strategies that are suited to their developmental stages, interests, and attention spans. As Cameron (2001) pointed out, vocabulary is central to language learning for children, and effective instruction must consider how young learners make sense of language and the world around them. Vocabulary is not just about words; it involves knowing how words relate to real-life experiences (Diamond & Gutlohn, 2006; Neuman & Dwyer, 2009; Stahl & Nagy, 2007).

Cameron (2001) also identified four essential aspects of vocabulary learning for young learners:

- 1) **Meaning:** Children need to learn the meanings of words in context. According to Hornby (1995), vocabulary is a list of meaningful words, and understanding meaning helps learners to express ideas clearly and avoid miscommunication.
- 2) **Spelling:** For young learners, spelling is part of developing literacy skills. Santika (2024) explained that spelling is the knowledge of how letters form words, which influences both pronunciation and understanding.
- 3) **Pronunciation:** Young learners are especially receptive to sound. Andriani and Sriwahyuningsih (2019) defined pronunciation as producing correct sounds in the correct context, which is essential for oral communication.
- 4) **Grammar:** Children also need to learn how words work in sentences. Batstone (1994) emphasised that grammar is a set of rules that organise language and give structure to meaning.

Vocabulary mastery for young learners refers to their ability to understand and use words accurately and appropriately in different situations. It involves more than memorisation; it requires the ability to apply vocabulary in both spoken and written forms (Furqon, 2013; Nugroho et al., 2012). Ambarwati and Mandasari (2020) stated that young learners demonstrate vocabulary mastery when they can use words effectively in real-life contexts. (Alqahtani, 2015) added that vocabulary mastery allows learners to express and understand ideas effectively, which is essential for meaningful communication.

Asyiah (2017) defined vocabulary mastery as comprehensive word knowledge, and Jambari et al. (2021) stressed the importance of continually enriching that knowledge. Without enough vocabulary, young learners may find it difficult to express themselves or understand classroom materials (Marwanto, 2018; Sari & Aminatun, 2021). Vocabulary mastery also plays a critical role in learners' overall academic success and participation. Students with a strong vocabulary are more confident and active in classroom interactions (Bhakti & Marwanto, 2018). As Mahmudah (2014) concluded, vocabulary mastery is a core competence that supports the development of other essential skills.

b. Assessment of Vocabulary

Vocabulary assessment involves measuring learners' knowledge of word meanings and their ability to use vocabulary effectively in context (Pearson et al., 2007). Read (2007) stated that vocabulary assessment enables learners to identify the extent of their vocabulary knowledge, which is essential for understanding authentic texts and for effective communication in the target language.

Assessing vocabulary mastery helps identify students' strengths, areas for improvement, and learning progress. Coombe (2011) emphasised that vocabulary can be evaluated in various formats, with multiple-choice questions (MCQs) being one of the most widely used. MCQs are known for their reliability, efficiency, and ease of grading (Coombe et al., 2007). They

also tend to be familiar to learners and effective at measuring vocabulary at the recall and comprehension levels.

Coombe (2011) proposed several techniques for assessing vocabulary through MCQs:

- 1) Synonym recognition: identifying the word with a similar meaning to the target word.
- 2) Definition matching: selecting the correct word based on a given definition, or vice versa.
- 3) Meaning in context: interpreting a word's meaning based on how it is used in a sentence or passage.

These strategies ensure a comprehensive evaluation of learners' vocabulary knowledge, contributing to the overall development of their language proficiency.

B. Study of the Relevant Research

Several previous studies have investigated the integration of Baamboozle games in vocabulary instruction for EFL learners. This subchapter summarises these studies to outline their findings, methods, and pedagogical implications, thereby situating the present research within existing scholarship. Aryansyah (2024), for example, conducted a classroom action research (CAR) study to explore whether Baamboozle games could improve vocabulary learning outcomes among junior high school students in Bali. The study involved 31 students and was carried out in two cycles using vocabulary tests and observation sheets as instruments. The findings showed a noticeable improvement in students' vocabulary performance during the second cycle, indicating the effectiveness of Baamboozle games in supporting vocabulary development.

Amanda (2024) examined the impact of Baamboozle as a teaching medium by comparing the vocabulary mastery of students who were taught with Baamboozle to those who were not. The quasi-experimental research was conducted in a junior high school in Brebes with a total of 62 participants. Data were collected through vocabulary tests and questionnaires. The results demonstrated that students in the experimental group performed better in vocabulary mastery and expressed

enjoyment in learning through Baamboozle, highlighting its positive influence on both engagement and learning outcomes.

Similarly, Nabila (2023) employed a classroom action research approach to investigate the effectiveness of Baamboozle games in enhancing vocabulary mastery among junior high school students in Panti. The study was conducted over two cycles, and the results demonstrated a consistent improvement in learners' vocabulary performance from the first to the second cycle. This suggests that Baamboozle games can significantly support vocabulary acquisition.

While these studies provide valuable evidence regarding the use of Baamboozle in vocabulary teaching, most have focused on its general impact or compared different teaching methods. Few have investigated how Baamboozle games can specifically support the vocabulary development of upper-level young learners through a structured classroom action research framework. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining how Baamboozle games can be integrated effectively in teaching vocabulary to EFL young learners. In addition to evaluating the improvement in vocabulary mastery over two cycles, this study also seeks to gain deeper insights into learners' experiences and the specific vocabulary components (form, meaning, and use) that Baamboozle games help reinforce.