

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Learning English requires a lot of vocabulary, especially for people who are learning English as a second language. Learning new words well helps you improve your listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. However, learning irregular verbs is very hard because their patterns are hard to remember and don't follow a set pattern. So, teachers need to come up with new and interesting ways to help students learn irregular verbs.

Recent studies have demonstrated that game-based learning (GBL) can enhance student engagement and cognitive retention by incorporating elements of enjoyment and competition into the educational experience. Research, including Rahmawati (2024) and Alotaibi (2024), has shown that using games in English classes can improve both motivation and learning, especially when it comes to vocabulary and grammar. In the same way, Zumaro (2023) found that anagram games, where learners rearrange letters to make meaningful words, encourage active cognitive processing and repeated exposure to target forms, which are important for long-term memory. Anagram games have been effectively utilized in vocabulary acquisition; however, empirical studies regarding their application for the mastery of irregular verbs are limited. This gap underscores the necessity to investigate how anagram-based activities may enhance students' internalization of verb forms.

This study is based on Constructivist Learning Theory and Cognitive Information Processing Theory from a theoretical point of view. Constructivism stresses that learners should be actively involved in building knowledge by having meaningful experiences. Anagram games exemplify this principle by necessitating learners to reconstruct word forms through problem-solving and interaction. Cognitive Information Processing Theory, conversely, asserts that memory retention enhances when learners participate in deep processing, which includes manipulating, analyzing, and reorganizing linguistic input. Anagram activities help students remember and reorganize irregular verb forms over and over again, which helps them encode them better in long-term memory.

With the growing focus on active, learner-centered methods in English teaching, it is both timely and necessary to look into anagram games as a way to teach. Although there is an increasing amount of research on game-based language learning, not many studies have looked into how it can be used to teach specific grammatical points, like irregular verbs, especially in EFL contexts like Indonesia. This study is imperative as it tackles a persistent linguistic challenge that students' struggles with irregular verbs and simultaneously advances the evolution of English pedagogy by evaluating an economical, accessible, and engaging instructional method that corresponds with contemporary educational trends in interactive and digital learning.

Many studies have looked into how games can help students learn English, but most of them have only looked at vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, or reading comprehension (e.g., Rahmawati, 2024; Hafiza, 2024). There are not many real-world studies that have looked at using games to teach grammar, especially for verbs that don't follow the usual rules. Even fewer have specifically tested anagram games, even though they could help students remember things and improve their morphological awareness. Previous studies have frequently indicated favorable learner attitudes towards games, yet offered insufficient quantitative evidence concerning their efficacy in enhancing particular grammatical outcomes (Kusuma & Hartono, 2023). Consequently,

there is an absence of a thorough understanding regarding the impact of anagram games on learners' mastery, retention, and recognition of irregular verbs in an EFL context.

One of the hardest things about learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is getting the hang of irregular verbs. Irregular verbs don't follow the same patterns as regular verbs, so students have to learn their past and past participle forms separately. Many EFL learners, especially those who don't have a lot of chances to use English, tend to forget or mix up irregular verb forms even after being taught them many times. Traditional grammar-based teaching methods such as drills, rote memorization, and translation often result in low retention and lack of motivation, making irregular verb acquisition a recurring difficulty in grammar learning (Sari, 2022; Kusuma & Hartono, 2023).

In Indonesian higher education, grammar instruction is predominantly characterized by traditional, teacher-centered approaches that prioritize rote memorization of rules over student engagement. This causes a mismatch between how students like to learn usually through active, visual, and digital experiences and how teachers teach. Because of this, students may not be interested in what they're learning and may not learn much. Anagram games could be a new and easy way to teach that could help close this gap. Anagram games are a useful way to teach English as a second language (EFL) students how to use irregular verbs because they make learning fun and interactive. Players of an anagram game have to move letters around to make real words. Recent studies show that anagram games boost motivation, creativity, and memory retention in learners. This makes them a good way to learn irregular verbs.

This study is unique because it focuses on irregular verbs, which is a linguistic area that hasn't been studied much in research on game-based learning. This study utilizes anagram games as a pedagogical intervention, presenting a form-focused yet interactive methodology that integrates cognitive processing, memory retrieval, and learner motivation. Furthermore, it aims to furnish empirical evidence via an experimental design regarding the efficacy of anagram games in improving EFL learners' proficiency and retention of irregular verbs an area characterized by a scarcity of prior quantitative data. This combination of focus, method, and context adds new ideas to the growing field of grammar instruction through games and supports the move towards more interesting, student-centered teaching methods in EFL classrooms.

1.2.The Problems of Study

In relation to the background of the study above, below are the problems of the study:

1. Does the use of anagram games significantly affect EFL learners' mastery of irregular verbs?
2. What are the students' perceptions toward the use of anagram games in learning irregular verbs?

1.3.The Objectives of Study

In accordance to the problems of the study above, below are the objectives of the study:

1. To find out whether anagram games significantly affect EFL learners' mastery of irregular verbs.
2. To find out the learners' perceptions toward the use of anagram games in learning irregular verbs.

1.4.The Scope of Study

In order to limit the discussion, this study focuses solely on investigating the effect of using anagram games on students' mastery of irregular verbs among EFL students. The study does not examine other aspects of language learning such as pronunciation, sentence construction, or communicative competence.

1.5. The significance of Study

This study aims to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English language teaching.

1. **Theoretical Significance:** This study enhances the existing knowledge of game-based language learning by offering empirical evidence on the efficacy of anagram games in improving learners' proficiency in grammatical structures, particularly irregular verbs. It also helps to create teaching methods that mix form-focused instruction with cognitive engagement.
2. **Practical Significance:** The results will be useful for EFL teachers, curriculum developers, and instructional designers who want to use new, low-cost, and easy-to-access methods to teach grammar. Anagram games are a fun and interactive way for learners to get more involved and remember language structures better.