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Research article

Intercultural gamified strategies as an alternative for english vocabulary acquisition in rural schools

Estrategias interculturales gamificadas como alternativa para la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés en escuelas rurales

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Abstract

Introduction: English vocabulary acquisition becomes challenging when classroom instruction overlooks learners' everyday lives. **Objective:** To analyze the influence of gamified intercultural strategies based on traditional games on vocabulary acquisition among children in La Providencia parish, Guano canton, Chimborazo, Ecuador. **Methodology:** A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a pre-experimental quantitative component with a qualitative narrative component. Vocabulary was assessed before and after the intervention across six cultural categories: gastronomy, places, products, clothing, flora and fauna, and the local economy. Games such as Blind Volleyball and Sack Races were adapted as learning and assessment activities. **Results:** Average achievement increased from 44% to 81%, with improvements in gastronomy, the local economy, and clothing, while the places category reached 100%. Interviews revealed greater comfort, collaboration, and stronger connections between English and local culture. **Conclusion:** Intercultural gamification represents a viable and cost-effective alternative for teaching and assessing vocabulary in rural schools.

Resumen

Introducción: El vocabulario en inglés se dificulta cuando el aula ignora la vida cotidiana. **Objetivo:** Analizar la influencia de las

estrategias interculturales gamificadas, basadas en juegos tradicionales, sobre la adquisición de vocabulario en niños de la parroquia La Providencia, cantón Guano, Chimborazo, Ecuador. **Metodología:** Se empleó un diseño mixto que combina un componente cuantitativo preexperimental y uno cualitativo narrativo. El vocabulario se evalúa antes y después de la intervención en seis categorías culturales: gastronomía, lugares, productos, vestimenta, flora y fauna, y economía local. Juegos como Volley Ciego y Ensacados se adaptan como actividades de aprendizaje y evaluación. **Resultados:** El logro promedio aumenta del 44 % al 81 %, con avances en gastronomía, economía local y vestimenta, mientras que lugares alcanza el 100 %. Las entrevistas muestran mayor comodidad, colaboración y vinculación entre el inglés y la cultura local. **Conclusión:** La gamificación intercultural constituye una alternativa viable y económica para la enseñanza y la evaluación del vocabulario en escuelas rurales.

Introduction

Teaching English in a rural school entails a tension familiar to teachers. The language belongs to a distant context, while the classroom is located within a community with its own foods, labors, landscapes, and games. When lessons ignore that community, English becomes just another abstract subject, and vocabulary, in particular, ends up as a list of words to be memorized and forgotten. Gamification has gained ground as a way to bridge that distance, since it transforms practice into an activity that children want to share (Jara Chiriboga et al., 2025). The incorporation of traditional games adds an additional component: the culture that children already carry with them (Cerón López et al., 2022).

Vocabulary reveals that gap with greater clarity. A student cannot express much without words, and words endure when they are linked to something meaningful (Sutrisna, 2021). Many rural classrooms still resort to grammar exercises and isolated lists, so students face vocabulary without a context to sustain it (Shan & Abdul, 2022). The consequence is superficial learning; that is, a child may recognize a word on a test and yet fail to use it when needed. Contextual approaches, which tie new words to the student's environment, tend to generate better retention and more confident use (Samsudin et al., 2025).

Gamification consists of employing game elements in non-play contexts, such as the classroom. Reviews of its educational use report gains in motivation and participation, although the magnitude of the effect depends on the design of the activity (Sailer & Homner, 2020; Huang et al., 2020). In correspondence with those results, a recent meta-

analysis confirms that gamification improves learning when playful elements are aligned with instructional objectives (Lee & Baek, 2023). Culturally familiar games help children remember words in English and use them in conversation because they link them to practices they already recognize (Novitawati et al., 2022). Games also reduces the anxiety that keeps students silent and makes them more willing to speak.

Games also transform the perception of assessment. Activities with a playful format raise participation during evaluation (Camacho-Sánchez et al., 2023), and game-based learning fosters teamwork and other social skills alongside academic content. In this way, the game ceases to be merely a test of what the child knows and becomes part of how the child learns. Gamification, however, is not automatically useful. Poor design can foster harmful competition, discourage those who do not obtain rewards, and hold back slower-paced students (Almeida & Simoes, 2019). Motivation should come from the activity itself and not from points or badges (Sánchez-Mena & Martí-Parreño, 2017).

Game elements must remain tied to learning goals; otherwise, they become simple decoration. These warnings carry greater weight when the game is also used for assessment. Most studies on game-based learning focus on digital platforms; however, traditional non-digital games hold particular value in rural and intercultural contexts. Research describes how such games foster cooperation, cultural identity, and awareness of the local environment (Luchoro-Parrilla et al., 2024). The union between cultural tradition and gamification opens space for intercultural dialogue (Torres-Toukoumidis et al., 2018), and traditional games are understood as learning activities for contemporary students (Vasileva-Stojanovska et al., 2014).

Game-based language learning and gamification share principles that leverage immersion, immediate feedback, and meaningful repetition (Foncubierta Muriel & Rodríguez Santos, 2025). Research on rural bilingual education in Latin America points to the need for culturally rooted practices (Duque Salazar et al., 2024). Treating local culture as content rather than as a simple backdrop benefits vocabulary in English as a foreign language (Kambou & Soma, 2020). Despite these contributions, a gap persists; that is, studies tend to address gamification or traditional games as a teaching method and rarely combine them as a systematic way to assess learning. Even less do they do so in rural or indigenous contexts, where access to technology is limited and culturally responsive teaching is indispensable (Mulenga & Shilongo, 2025).

Ecuadorian educational policy includes English as a subject from the earliest years of schooling, but the conditions of rural schools hinder quality instruction. The scarcity of materials, limited teacher training, and the disconnect between content and community life reduce learning to repetition. Research on English teaching in rural contexts consistently points to these barriers and calls for strategies adapted to the setting (Shan & Abdul, 2022). Intercultural gamification, supported by games that do not require technology, emerges as a possible response to these demands. Its value lies in leveraging

resources available in the community and in turning local culture into learning content, which reduces dependence on external materials and strengthens students' sense of belonging.

The gap described is concretely manifested in Ecuadorian rural education. In La Providencia parish, located in Guano canton, Chimborazo province, children participating in a community English program begin with limited contextual vocabulary and a weak connection between the language and their environment. Their difficulties are concentrated in word recognition, contextual use, and confident oral expression. This situation calls for evidence on whether a playful approach grounded in the local context can improve vocabulary performance while respecting children's identity. Communicative and intercultural approaches provide an appropriate framework for this need by placing authentic language use and learners' culture at the center of the process (Basher et al., 2025; Baltag, 2017).

The study's theoretical framework articulates three complementary perspectives. Constructivism posits that knowledge is constructed through experience and social interaction rather than through mere transmission (Bhattacharjee, 2015; Mishra, 2023). Sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of language and mediation in cognitive development and highlights scaffolding as support for foreign language learning (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). Meaningful learning requires connecting new content to prior knowledge. To the extent that traditional games link English vocabulary to cultural practices already familiar to children, they meet the conditions for meaningful learning. Cognitive development theory also explains why rule-based games are effective for children of this age (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022).

The communicative approach prioritizes language use for authentic purposes over abstract repetition (Alimatova, 2024), aligning with the role that games assign to vocabulary during activities. The intercultural approach, in turn, recognizes traditions and identity as legitimate classroom content (Baltag, 2017). Combining both approaches with gamification makes it possible to conceptualize a model in which assessment is no longer a separate stage but becomes integrated into the game. A relaxed and supportive classroom climate is a prerequisite for effective language learning, as fear of making mistakes keeps many students silent. Cooperative games reduce this fear and encourage participation among students who tend to remain quiet.

Traditional games have particular potential to strengthen cultural identity while simultaneously serving as a bridge to the foreign language. Adaptations of games such as Blind Volleyball, Sack Races, Perinola, and Boliche preserve the physical movement and group interaction of the original games while incorporating target vocabulary, so that each turn becomes an opportunity for language use. Because these games belong to the community, vocabulary is linked to experiences that children understand, a condition upon which meaningful learning depends. The cooperation and cultural

recognition inherent in these games counteract the risks of harmful competition identified in the literature (Almeida & Simoes, 2019). Local identity is reinforced while English proficiency progresses in each session.

Despite the advances described, hybrid models combining physical play, social interaction, and gamified assessment remain insufficiently documented. Most research focuses on digital platforms and urban contexts, while studies adapting traditional games as a systematic assessment instrument in rural schools are scarce. The lack of local evidence makes it difficult for teachers to adopt culturally responsible practices supported by empirical findings. It is therefore necessary to generate knowledge regarding the actual effectiveness of these strategies in specific communities. The present study addresses this gap in a rural parish of Chimborazo, where intercultural gamification offers a viable and cost-effective alternative to conventional English vocabulary instruction and assessment.

The justification for the study lies in the need to offer rural teachers an alternative for teaching and assessing English vocabulary that recognizes local culture and reduces dependence on scarce technological resources. Based on the foregoing, the scientific question guiding the research asks: In what way do gamified intercultural strategies, based on traditional games, influence English vocabulary acquisition in children from La Providencia parish? The objective is to analyze the influence of those strategies on English vocabulary acquisition in that population, through a mixed-methods design that compares performance before and after the intervention and gathers participants' assessment of the activities carried out.

Methodology

The study followed a mixed-methods approach with an integrated design, which prioritized the quantitative component and used the qualitative component to interpret it. The quantitative side adopted a single-group pre-experimental design with pretest and posttest, so that vocabulary could be compared before and after the games. The qualitative side used a biographical-narrative design to read how the children experienced the game and what meaning they attributed to it. The articulation of both allowed for triangulation, which gave greater strength to the interpretation.

The research was conducted in La Providencia parish, a rural community in Guano canton, in Chimborazo province, Ecuador. Participants were children between 9 and 13 years old who attended a community English program aimed at children, adolescents, and members of the popular and solidarity economy of the rural parishes at canton. Due to the small size of the group, all its members took part in the study and no sample was drawn. That decision privileged ecological validity over statistical power, so the results described a real classroom and not a controlled environment.

Each instrument corresponded to one of the specific objectives, so that method and purpose remained aligned. A diagnostic vocabulary test opened the study. Its items were contextualized based on traditional games, cultural practices, and everyday rural life, and were organized into six categories: gastronomy, places, products, clothing, flora and fauna, and local economy. Each category contained five items, with a score of 0 to 5. The choice of games was based on systematic observation and a list that assessed cultural relevance, feasibility, and alignment with the goals. A posttest with the same structure followed the intervention and allowed a direct comparison before and after.

A semi-structured interview gathered children's opinion of how they felt, what they enjoyed, what they believed they had learned, and what they found difficult. The questions explored the emotional, motivational, cognitive, and social dimensions of the experience, without imposing prior categories. The script was piloted with two children of similar characteristics before its final application, and the resulting adjustments improved the questions clarity. The responses were recorded in writing and complemented with observation notes taken during the game sessions. The posttest and the interview combination made it possible to contrast what was measured with what was narrated.

The intervention reconstructed local games as tasks for learning and assessment. Blind Volleyball, Sack Races, Perinola, and Boliche de Guano were among those selected, all familiar to children through community life. The redesign kept the physical movement and group game from the original, and added target vocabulary to them, so that a turn in the game also became a moment of language use. Since the games belonged to the community, the vocabulary got associated with something the children already understood, a condition on which meaningful learning depended. To validate the gamified resources, a rubric assessed by an expert in English teaching and educational methodology was used. The instrument rated cultural relevance, methodological coherence, design clarity, feasibility, and effect on cultural identity of each adapted game. The review confirmed that the games reflected local practices, that their structure was aligned with the learning goals, and that the results came from the design and not from chance. The expert's observations led to minor adjustments in the instructions elaboration and in the turns distribution.

The pretest and posttest data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The mean, median, and mode summarized each category, and the achievement percentages made the change easy to read. The central tendency measures were chosen because of the ordinal items scale and the small size of the group, which made inferential tests unfeasible. The interview data were analyzed in two steps: categorization organized the responses into themes, according to (Pérez Calderón & Lombardo Marrone, 2022), and thematic analysis examined the emotional, motivational, cognitive, and social patterns.

Triangulation placed the pretest, the posttest, and the interview side by side, which reduced the risk of overinterpreting a single source.

The study followed the ethical practice customary in research with children. Families gave written informed consent before the intervention began, participation was voluntary, and the minors' responses were kept confidential and used only for research purposes. The participants identity was safeguarded through codes in the records, and any form of pressure during the activities was avoided. The researcher explained to children, in simple language, the purpose of each session and their right to withdraw at any time.

Results

The results are presented in two parts. The quantitative evidence from the pretest and posttest records the vocabulary growth in the six cultural categories, and the qualitative evidence from observation and interviews shows how children experienced the intervention. Table 1 synthesizes the descriptive statistics of the six categories before and after the games, and includes the mean, median, mode, and achievement percentage per category, based on five items per dimension and five participants (n = 5). In all categories, the central tendency measures and the achievement percentage increased steadily. Reading both sources together makes it possible to describe how intercultural gamification affected linguistic performance and classroom climate at the same time.

Table 1. *Pretest and posttest descriptive statistics by category (n = 5)*

Category	Pre-test M	Pre-test Md	Pre-test Mo	Pre-test achievement (%)	Post-test M	Post-test Md	Post-test Mo	Post-test achievement (%)
Gastronomy	0,8	0	0	16	4,0	4	4	80
Places	3,2	3	4	64	5,0	5	5	100
Products	3,6	3	3	72	4,8	5	5	96
Clothing	1,2	1	1	24	3,0	2	2	60
Flora and fauna	2,8	3	3	56	4,2	4	4	84
Local economy	1,6	2	2	32	3,4	3	3	68
Average	2,2	—	—	44	4,1	—	—	81

Note. Scores from 0 to 5 on five items per category. M = mean; Md = median; Mo = mode; percentages represent the achievement level.

Gastronomy started from a level close to zero. The pretest mean was 0.8, equivalent to 16%, which indicates that children knew very few food words in English at the outset.

After the games, the mean reached 4.0 (80%), and both the median and the mode went from 0 to 4. An advance of that magnitude is consistent with the idea that linking a word to a familiar dish gives it a place to endure, an inherent mechanism to meaningful learning. The items in that category were associated with foods from the parish, and the games that included them made it possible to repeat the vocabulary in an affective and shared context. The change shows that cultural rootedness enhances lexical retention in children.

Places started from a stronger position, with a pretest mean of 3.2 (64%). After the intervention, all the children reached the maximum score, so the mean, median, and mode reached 5 (100%). These are words that the children daily encounter in their environment, so the games merely activated knowledge already close to their reality. The result is consistent with sociocultural and communicative descriptions of language learning, according to which the familiar context sustains language use (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022; Alimatova, 2024). The referents proximity reduced cognitive load and favored rapid vocabulary acquisition. The category with the best initial performance closed with complete achievement.

Products offered one of the clearest results. The mean went from 3.6 (72%) to 4.8 (96%), with the median and mode at 5. The children already recognized many of these words, and the repetition and interaction incorporated into the games pushed that recognition toward reliable use. The items were linked to agricultural and artisanal goods from the environment, which provided concrete referents for the vocabulary. The improvement, although smaller in relative terms because of the high starting point, confirms that the game consolidates what the student already intuits. The maximum scores stability on the posttest also suggests firm lexicon retention after the intervention.

Clothing improved from a low start. The pretest mean of 1.2 (24%) rose to 3.0 (60%), with gains in the median and mode. The category did not reach maximum scores, but the change shows that culturally rooted play can boost vocabulary even where children start from very little. The items were associated with clothing for daily and festive use in the community, and their inclusion in movement games facilitated the association between the word and its referent. The progress, although moderate, was significant in proportional terms and reinforced the intercultural approach value for lower initial mastery categories. The advance indicates a productive margin for improvement in future sessions.

Flora and fauna went from a mean of 2.8 (56%) to 4.2 (84%), with the median rising from 3 to 4. Linking English words with community plants and animals gave vocabulary a real referent and, at the same time, directed children's attention toward their own environment. The games that integrated these items combined movement, observation, and naming, which multiplied the opportunities for lexical use. The result reinforces the idea that local environment contact functions as scaffolding for foreign language

learning (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). The category showed how cultural and linguistic content sustain each other during the game.

Local economy was the most difficult category at the outset, with a mean of 1.6 (32%). It reached 3.4 (68%) after the intervention. Words about commerce and work were unfamiliar in English, but their insertion into games about community life made them more accessible and durable. The items were related to fairs, barter, and labors specific to the parish, and the children associated them with nearby experiences. The advance, although the smallest in absolute terms, doubled the achievement percentage and showed the approach potential for semantic fields of less frequent use. Contextualization compensated, at least in part, for the low prior exposure to the lexicon.

To appreciate the individual trajectory, Table 2 presents each participant total scores on the pretest and posttest, calculated as the sum of the six categories over a maximum of 30 points. The table makes it possible to read the progress by student and confirm that no child regressed. The gains distribution shows generalized improvement, with larger jumps among those who started from the lowest levels. The reading by participant complements the aggregate view by category and reveals that the intervention impact reached all group members. The individual detail is relevant in a study with a small sample, since it nuances the central tendencies and highlights the starting points heterogeneity.

The individual detail confirms the general trend. Participant S5, with the lowest initial score (9 out of 30), doubled her performance and reached 20 points. Those who started at levels near 13 points surpassed 23 on the posttest, and the participant with the best start (S4, 17 points) reached 27. Overall, the global average achievement rose from 44% to 81%, which represents an increase of 37 percentage points. No child reduced his or her score, and the gains were distributed across all categories, although with greater intensity in those with a low starting point. The advance rules homogeneity out the hypothesis of progress attributable to a single student and supports the intervention effect on the group as a whole.

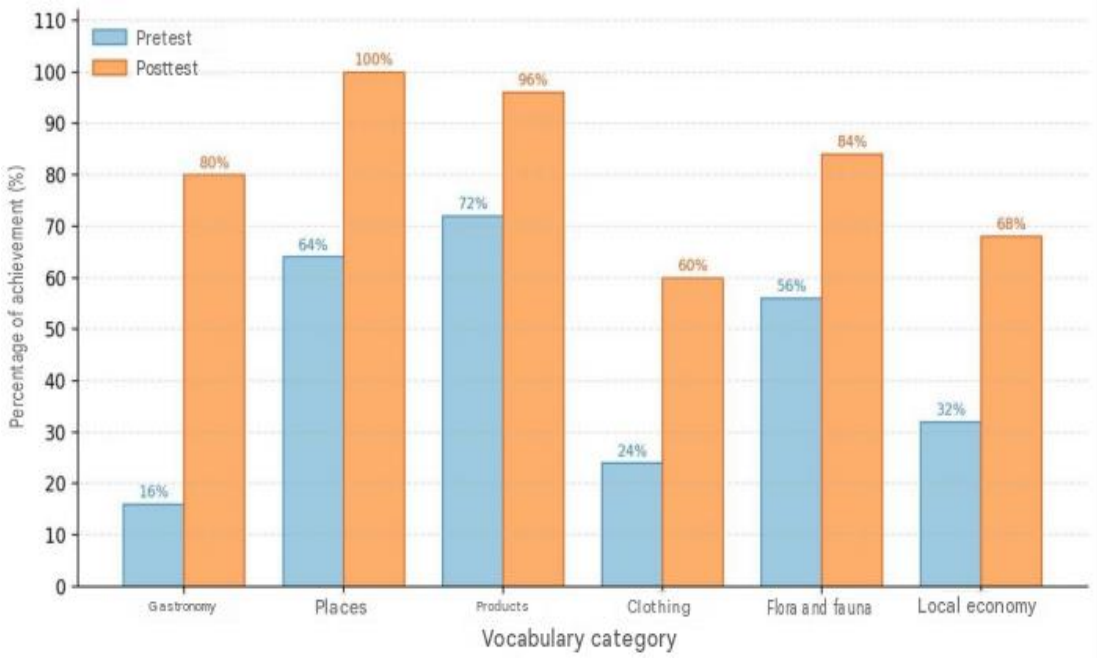
Table 2. *Total scores per participant on the pretest and posttest (out of 30 points)*

Participant	Pretest	Posttest	Gain
S1	13	24	+11
S2	14	28	+14
S3	13	23	+10
S4	17	27	+10
S5	9	20	+11
Average	13,2 (44 %)	24,4 (81 %)	+11,2

Note. Total score results from adding the six categories, each with five items rated from 0 to 5. The percentage is calculated over the maximum of 30 points.

Figure 1 compares the achievement percentage on the pretest and posttest in the six categories, in order to offer a visual reading of the change. The grouped bar chart makes it possible to appreciate at a glance the advance magnitude by dimension and the difference between the high- and low-start categories. The visual representation complements the data in the tables and makes evident that the greatest growth was concentrated in the categories tied to children's everyday environment. The figure summarizes, in a single way, the improvement general pattern and supports the integrated reading of quantitative performance with the qualitative experience gathered in the interviews.

Figure 1. *Achievement percentage comparison on the pretest and posttest by category*



Note. The graph shows correct answers percentage on the pretest and posttest for each category, based on an assessment of five items per dimension.

The figure places the six categories side by side. All improved, and the broadest gains fell to the categories tied to children's environment. Across the six dimensions as a whole, average achievement rose from 44% before the intervention to 81% after. The reason lies in the construction of the games: each carried target vocabulary within a contextual and social task that reflected known traditions, so the children were able to attach new words to experiences they already possessed. That mechanism coincides with what constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning describe (Bhattacharjee, 2015; Mishra, 2023; Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022). Learning occurred through joint participation and not through solitary lists memorization.

When children were asked how they felt about using games from their own community to learn English, their responses were uniformly positive. They spoke of feeling happy, curious, comfortable, and calm, and several described a sense of discovery. The thematic opinion examination, following the step-by-step coding procedure (Caulfield,

2023), revealed four recurring dimensions: emotional, motivational, cognitive, and social. A relaxed and friendly climate of that kind constitutes the condition under which language learning tends to thrive, since fear of error keeps numerous students silent. Sack Races and Blind Volleyball were the games children named most frequently as favorites, and they linked them with teamwork, movement, and learning by doing.

The emotional dimension grouped references to joy and calm, and several children noted that they lost their fear of making mistakes. The motivational dimension gathered opinion about the desire to attend the sessions and the feeling that time was short. The cognitive dimension included mentions of remembering words and using them in simple sentences, while the social dimension covered comments about teamwork and classmates' abilities recognition. The simultaneous presence of the four dimensions in the opinion confirms that the game activated affective, cognitive, and relational resources at the same time. The narrated experience richness went beyond simple lexical retention and encompassed the classroom climate as a whole.

It stands out that the children spoke of cooperation and group game, and not of beating others, a tone the intervention sought from the design stage. Their accounts coincide with the finding that game-based learning builds motivation along with social skills (Camacho-Sánchez et al., 2023). Children also noted that the games helped them remember words and use them more easily than ordinary classroom work. Their progress perception aligned with the measured gains, which explains why the two kinds of evidence reinforce each other in this study. The convergence among scores, observation, and children's accounts configures a coherent picture of the strategies effect on vocabulary and the classroom experience.

Discussion

The results point in a single direction. The incorporation of traditional games into the classroom, and their use for assessment as well as for teaching, improved vocabulary, raised participation, and made the children more comfortable with English. The gains extended to all six categories, and the interviews told the same story as the scores. Vocabulary related to everyday life, such as places, products, local economy, and clothing, was learned and retained more easily once housed in the familiar game. The pattern coincides with reports on culturally familiar games as a way for children to remember and use words in English (Novitawati et al., 2022). The convergence between what was measured and what was narrated enhances the reading of the change.

The positive feeling that children described supports the idea that a low-anxiety environment favors language learning. Game reduced fear of error and made students more willing to speak and take risks, an effect already observed in studies on traditional games as a means of English learning (Novitawati et al., 2022). While much of the

literature relies on digital platforms, the present study shows that non-digital games reach similar levels of participation, an aspect relevant in places where technology is scarce (Mulenga & Shilongo, 2025). The equivalence between digital and physical game suggests that the active factor is not the medium, but the cultural relevance and cooperative activity design.

From the theoretical perspective, the results support the notion of meaningful learning. Vocabulary increased most where new words could be tied to prior cultural knowledge, and the effect manifested itself even in the weakest categories, gastronomy and local economy, where progress was steady though less abrupt. Cognitive development theory helps explain why games with rules worked, since the rules invited active participation and repetition at a level children could manage (Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022). Learning occurred through interaction and cultural recognition, and not through lists memorization, which is what communicative and intercultural approaches anticipate (Basher et al., 2025; Baltag, 2017).

The study also aligns with concerns raised in the literature. Meta-analyses caution that gamification does not always align with conventional assessment practices (Lee & Baek, 2023). The present findings suggest that, when games are culturally relevant, cooperative, and carefully planned, they can serve as a robust alternative for assessment. Whereas other studies identify competition and discouragement as potential risks (Almeida & Simoes, 2019), the games used in this study were based on cooperation and shared goals, consistent with research on traditional and intercultural games (Luchoro-Parrilla et al., 2024; Torres-Toukoumidis et al., 2018). The cooperative design mitigated harmful effects and transformed assessment into a natural component of the game.

The study's main contribution lies in addressing a specific gap. The literature tends to approach digital gamification or traditional games as instructional strategies and rarely as systematic assessment tools, particularly in rural or intercultural contexts (Duque Salazar et al., 2024). By developing and validating a model that combines local culture, physical movement, social interaction, and gamified assessment, this study demonstrates that assessment can be both rigorous and culturally responsive. This combination provides a practical alternative to standardized testing, which frequently overlooks the social and cultural context in which students live. The contribution is particularly relevant for rural teachers, who often have limited resources and work with students from diverse cultural traditions.

The value of the intercultural approach becomes practical rather than abstract in the findings. By integrating elements of rural life and community knowledge into the activity, children participated more willingly and began to perceive English as connected to their environment rather than as an isolated subject. Local culture functioned as content rather than merely as a backdrop, a benefit previously identified in English-as-

a-foreign-language vocabulary learning (Kambou & Soma, 2020). Children's identities were reinforced while their English proficiency advanced, producing a dual effect that traditional grammar instruction rarely achieves. The integration of identity and foreign language learning constitutes a distinctive feature of the model and opens possibilities for its replication in comparable communities.

Traditional games, adapted with respect for their original form, demonstrated their relevance as a pedagogical resource. The adaptations preserved physical movement and group interaction while incorporating target vocabulary without distorting the community meaning of the games. Preserving the rules and local names reinforced cultural identity and, simultaneously, provided verifiable referents for English learning (Cerón López et al., 2022). The integration of tradition and gamification creates opportunities for intercultural dialogue in the classroom (Torres-Toukoumidis et al., 2018) and confirms the value of traditional games as learning activities for contemporary students (Vasileva-Stojanovska et al., 2014). The model capitalizes on a freely available heritage present in every rural community.

The viability of the model in contexts without technology constitutes a practical contribution. Whereas digital proposals require devices, connectivity, and maintenance, traditional games require only a space and willing participants. This difference is decisive in rural schools, where internet access is unstable and budgets are limited (Mulenga & Shilongo, 2025). Moreover, the model is sustainable over time because the games belong to the community and do not depend on licenses or updates. The sustainability of the approach derives from its cultural roots and low cost, features that facilitate its adoption by teachers with limited resources. Its transferability requires only the identification of games specific to each location and their articulation with the vocabulary to be taught.

The results also have clear limitations. The design used a single group without a control condition, so it cannot rule out other change explanations, such as ordinary maturation or children's familiarization with the test. The number of participants was small, which restricts the generalization of the results. No follow-up was conducted, so the study cannot affirm whether the gains were maintained over time. Future work should incorporate a control group, a larger and more varied sample, a delayed posttest, and measures of vocabulary transfer to other linguistic skills. These cautions do not nullify the contribution, but they frame its scope and guide the continuity of the line of research.

In pedagogical terms, the results point toward concrete paths for rural teachers. The culturally familiar games incorporation into teaching and formative assessment is viable and economical, and does not require digital infrastructure. Cooperative design and children's prior knowledge recognition appear as key conditions for success. Assessment, by integrating into the game, loses its punitive character and becomes an

occasion for learning. The results also support teacher training in intercultural and playful strategies, an aspect identified as necessary for rural bilingual education in Latin America (Duque Salazar et al., 2024). These strategies transfer to other subjects and levels appears as a natural projection of the carried out work.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the study, children at La Providencia parish knew little contextual vocabulary in English and felt a weak connection between language and their world. Traditional games adaptation such as Blind Volleyball and Sack Races to carry contextual vocabulary made learning more inclusive and attractive, and children began to treat English as something linked to their environment and not as a foreign subject. The comparison made before and after showed sustained progress in the six categories, with an average achievement that rose from 44% to 81%. No child regressed, and the broadest gains fell to the categories with a low starting point, which indicates a compensatory effect of the approach on less consolidated knowledge.

Overall, the results support gamified intercultural strategies as a viable and economical option for teaching and assessing English vocabulary in rural schools. Learning occurred through joint participation and through the articulation between new vocabulary and prior knowledge, in tune with constructivism and sociocultural theory. Games with rules favored the assimilation and accommodation described by cognitive development theory, and the communicative approach was expressed in the use of language with purpose during the game. The proposal does not require digital infrastructure and takes advantage of a heritage available in every community, which broadens its potential for transfer to other rural realities.

The conclusions recognize their limitations. The absence of a control group and the small sample size make it impossible to affirm with full certainty that the change is due only to the intervention, and the lack of a delayed follow-up makes it impossible to verify the learning permanence. Future work should incorporate a control group, a larger sample, and long-term retention measures. Rural teacher training also appears as the model enabling condition, since without a command of playful and intercultural strategies the game is reduced to entertainment without an assessment purpose. Despite these restrictions, the study offers initial and contextual evidence on a viable pedagogical alternative for teaching and assessing English vocabulary in rural schools.

About

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