



REVISTA KRONOS

Enhancing Vocabulary Retention through Routine-Based Activities in Young EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT The primary objective of this study was to investigate the influence of implementing routine-based activities on vocabulary retention among 13 young learners aged 4 to 5 years attending a private school in Cuenca, Ecuador. To carry out this study, an Exploratory Action Research design was used to analyze students' initial context and the results obtained after the intervention. To collect data, pre-tests and post-tests, observation protocols, weekly assessments, and final interviews were used. To assess students' prior knowledge of the target vocabulary, a pre-test was administered in the first phase, followed by the second phase, during which subsequent sessions taught the target vocabulary through the intervention. Each week included five sessions, in which, from session one to four, four words were learned and reinforced cumulatively, while session five was used to evaluate students' vocabulary retention learned during the week. Observation protocols were used to monitor students' performance through routine-based assessments. In the last session, a post-test was implemented to measure students' vocabulary retention, and a final interview was conducted to determine students' perceptions about the use of this teaching strategy. The findings indicated improvements in vocabulary retention, pronunciation, confidence, and engagement.

KEYWORDS Routines, repetition, vocabulary retention, Young EFL learners, exploratory action research.

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Mejorar la retención de vocabulario mediante actividades basadas en rutinas en niños aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera.

RESUMEN El objetivo principal de este estudio fue investigar el impacto de la implementación de actividades basadas en rutinas en la retención de vocabulario de 13 jóvenes estudiantes de 4 a 5 años que asisten a una escuela privada en Cuenca, Ecuador. Para llevar a cabo este estudio, se utilizó un diseño de Investigación-Acción Exploratoria para analizar el contexto inicial de los estudiantes y los resultados obtenidos después de la intervención. Para recopilar datos, se utilizaron pre-tests, protocolos de observación, evaluaciones semanales, post-tests y entrevistas finales. Durante la primera sesión, para evaluar el conocimiento previo de los estudiantes sobre el vocabulario objetivo, se administró un pre-test. Las sesiones posteriores se utilizaron para enseñar el vocabulario objetivo a través de la intervención. Cada semana incluyó cinco sesiones, en las cuales, de la sesión uno a la cuatro, se aprendieron y reforzaron acumulativamente cuatro palabras, mientras que la sesión cinco se utilizó para evaluar la retención de vocabulario de los estudiantes durante la semana. Se utilizaron protocolos de observación para monitorear el desempeño de los estudiantes mediante el uso de rutinas. En la última sesión, se implementó un post-test para medir la retención de vocabulario de los estudiantes y se realizó una entrevista final para determinar las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el uso de esta estrategia de enseñanza. Los hallazgos incluyeron mejoras en la retención de vocabulario, la pronunciación, la confianza y el compromiso.

PALABRAS CLAVE Rutinas, repetición, retención de vocabulario, jóvenes aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera, investigación-acción exploratoria.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a vital aspect of human nature, as it enables people to share ideas effectively (Tolliboyeva & Shakarova, 2024). One of its essential components is vocabulary, which consists of words that can be used to express a significant opinion. This component allows humans to understand given ideas. Building one's vocabulary at a young age is beneficial as it develops cognitive flexibility (Bialystok, 2018) and literacy skills (Madsen et al., 2022).

Retrieval-based practice, which involves recalling words constantly over time, is one strategy that can be used to achieve this goal (Adesope et al., 2017). Read (2019) also mentions that through the implementation of repetitive and meaningful activities, students can gradually improve their learning and expand their vocabulary. All these elements should be used when preparing the vocabulary base of young learners.

One of the fundamental principles of the English curriculum proposal is that language should not be memorized; instead, it should be learned through connection with others and the sharing of ideas (Ministerio de Educación, Deporte y Cultura, 2016). To achieve this goal, the curriculum emphasizes the use of the Communicative Approach (CA) that privileges the use of learner-centered teaching methodologies that develop students' language learning and linguistic competencies (Ministerio de Educación, Deporte y Cultura, 2016).

There are specific instructional approaches under the CA such as task-based learning, content-based instruction and project-based learning (PBL). The PBL is one of the approaches

that reinforces the use of projects as a mechanism to increase students' exposure to the language using significant activities, and it is one of the instructional approaches commonly used in Ecuadorian classrooms (Muñoz & Gonzalez, 2025). Despite the perceived benefits of the PBL, there are some authors who mention that, although PBL can have various advantages, it may not be beneficial for students due to time constraints (Muñoz & Gonzalez, 2025). Thus, it is essential to apply a teaching strategy that is consistent in the classroom, considering retrieval-based practice and engaging activities that can help young EFL students learn English effectively.

In this study, an EFL classroom located in Cuenca, Ecuador, was chosen, where a group of thirteen (13) students, aged 4 to 5 years old, participated. As the prior students' context was unknown to the teacher-researcher, their former teacher participated in an interview in order to understand aspects of the students' learning in the previous school year. Based on the previous teacher's account, students enjoyed English lessons when activities such as singing songs, playing interactive games, and using colorful flashcards were involved, implying that students enjoy learning English when activities are interactive and dynamic. However, it is evident from the interviews conducted with the previous teacher that, despite students' engagement and enjoyment, they did not remember the words previously taught to them. Forgetting the vocabulary learned after a certain amount of time has lapsed suggests that children's capacity to recall is the gap in current practice that needs exploration to ensure that young learners recall the words they were exposed to before. Moreover, even though these activities were implemented in the lessons, students tend to forget the vocabulary when reinforcement was not applied. In this study, the former teacher suggested including vocabulary related to school supplies, as it was not adequately learned during the previous school year, and due to its relevance for the current academic period.

To ensure that young learners do not forget the vocabulary they are learning, it is imperative to introduce a series of words that they encounter on a daily basis, reinforcing the retention of the meaning of each word learned. To accomplish this, routine-based activities were employed in this study, yielding positive outcomes not only in students' vocabulary retention but also in their confidence, participation, and engagement.

To determine the influence of routine-based activities on students' vocabulary retention, the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) design was employed, which has two phases: the exploratory phase and the actual action research phase. The first phase was used to explore students' initial context before the intervention. The second phase was used to analyze the influence of routine-based activities on vocabulary retention after the study. To gather students' data, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods was employed. After data collection, the findings revealed that students improved their vocabulary learning, engagement, and confidence throughout the intervention, which was confirmed in the final interview, as most students responded positively to the use of routine-based activities to enhance vocabulary retention and engagement.

This research is relevant to English learning, as it aims to address students' poor retention, a common issue in language learning. Therefore, consistent and engaging activities embedded in daily classroom routines are proposed as essential to mitigate this challenge, which will be analyzed in response to the research question: How does the implementation of routine-based activities in the classroom influence the retention of vocabulary in young learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary Retention.

Remembering words over time is one of the challenges that students face when learning English (Huyen & Oanh, 2025); consequently, a teaching strategy that incorporates consistent and meaningful activities needs to be implemented. Sousa (2016) supports this idea, indicating that repetition and contextualized activities are necessary to consolidate students' vocabulary learning. Moreover, Janczukowicz (2021) mentions that learning can be stored in short-term memory if meaningful connections in activities are not considered in teaching. However, not only consistent, meaningful, and contextualized activities are vital to raising vocabulary retention, but also the number of words selected to be taught, as a reduced number of words can be enough for students to retain and reinforce the vocabulary effectively over time. Peters-Sanders et al. (2020) support this idea in their study with children, where four words were considered to be instructed through repetition and explicit teaching each week. Similarly, Coyne et al. (2022) confirm this idea, indicating that a reduced number of words is relevant for students to raise vocabulary retention. Thus, consistent, meaningful, and repetitive activities, including a small set of words, are necessary to achieve retention in young EFL learners. Understanding how learners retain vocabulary is not the only aspect that needs to be considered; analyzing learning theories is another primary step.

Learning Theories Supporting Language Learning and Retention.

Different studies emphasize Skinner's perspective on behaviorism, highlighting the importance of continued practice and repetition in learning (Budiman, 2017). Moreover, this latter term can be applied to various teaching techniques, including drills and guided practice, which are commonly used due to their benefits for students' communication skills (Annisa et al., 2025). The use of drills reinforces responsive skills as students repeat the words they are learning on a daily basis. This technique strengthens the capacity of learners to remember previously learned words. Routines, a teaching strategy known for incorporating consistent repetition and ongoing practice, are, according to Jeremiah et al. (2025), a powerful way to enable students to develop habits.

Piaget identifies distinct stages in the growth process of children, as mentioned in Rabin-dran and Madanagopal's (2020) study, who analyze the cognitive development theory. This study emphasizes the preoperational stage, as the participants of this study belong to this phase. In this study, Piaget indicates that children at this age communicate through symbolic representations (Rabin-dran & Madanagopal, 2020). Therefore, colorful and meaningful visuals should be implemented through constant and continued practice, as mental flexibility can be enhanced through ongoing and repeated reinforcement (Bialystok, 2018).

Zakarneh et al. (2021b) explained their study through a sociocultural perspective, emphasizing that language learning can be achieved through social interactions among learners. As Tolliboyeva and Shakarova (2024) state, «communication is essential by nature» (p. 828); therefore, individuals cannot convey ideas without social interaction, which is a natural activity. Similarly, Ho (2021) emphasizes the importance of social interactions in the classroom, as they enable students to learn from one another. These language learning theories provide a basis for understanding how memory works in the retention of vocabulary.

The Role of Memory in Vocabulary Retention.

It is essential to understand the memory process when learning vocabulary, as it enables educators to select the most effective teaching strategy in the classroom (Gordon & Lowry, 2024). First, short-term memory enables learners to recognize new words; however, they tend to forget unfamiliar terms after a period of time (Janczukowicz, 2021). Working memory refers to the temporary retention used to perform a specific activity, whose storage can diminish without reinforcement (Wen & Li, 2019). Finally, long-term memory is the last stage in memory, which requires a deeper internalization of concepts, involving semantic memory and procedural memory as both important components. These elements allow focus on both meaning and independent use of the language (Sousa, 2016). One strategy that can be used to achieve this type of memory is retrieval practice, which allows constant recall of the learned content (Adesope et al., 2017).

Repetition in Language Teaching.

Repetition is contemplated in this study due to its several benefits, which include the development of motor skills, the formation of associations, and the establishment of habits (Annisa et al., 2025). Therefore, in order to apply repetition effectively, it should be personalized, meaningful, and distributed over time (Revutska, 2020; Sousa, 2016). This last term is defined by Sousa (2016) as the repetition of information over several weeks to retain it, which is considered an effective method for vocabulary learning.

Routine-Based Activities as a Teaching Strategy Used to Enhance Vocabulary Retention.

The conceptualization of routine-based activities rests on the premises of classic theorists such as Piaget, Skinner, and Vygotsky. Skinner emphasized the use of repetition to fix certain words so that young learners remember the words. Word recall is possible through visuals, which Piaget strongly suggests. The use of visuals is key towards retention, specifically for young learners, as association is still very concrete and explicit. Through constant repetition using visuals, young learners are most likely to engage in social interaction, which Vygotsky highlights in his theory on the importance of social interaction. Young learners learn well when they interact through the words they produce and the activities they engage in.

As routines are a powerful teaching strategy used to cultivate a practice and interact with the environment (Jeremiah et al., 2025), they can be used in classrooms to enhance students' confidence and focus (Burden, 2020). According to Read (2019), learning routines not only improve students' behavior and participation but also provide teachers

with several benefits, such as improved classroom management and increased learners' attention in the classroom.

When employing routine-based activities, Read (2019) highlights the importance of considering guidelines in applying the appropriate routine to the group of learners. A crucial point is to determine a suitable routine based on the students' needs and the language point that will be taught during the selected time. This routine should be applied during each lesson and modeled by the teacher, who should support students through nonverbal or verbal responses until learners have internalized the established procedure.

When students have learned and internalized the routine, teachers should progressively extend the language points so that children can expand their vocabulary. The implementation of routines in classrooms is a valuable teaching strategy as it significantly enhances vocabulary retention in students' language development. Moreover, it promotes consistency, reinforces prior knowledge, and helps learners store vocabulary in a meaningful way.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the EAR design, comprising two phases: an exploratory phase and an actual action research phase. This design was chosen as it aims to understand the classroom context and situation first, after which the intervention is implemented to observe changes throughout the intervention (Smith & Rebolledo, 2022), which represents the principal goal of this research.

In line with this, the study addressed the following sub-questions:

1. In what way do routine-based activities support vocabulary retention?
2. How do young learners respond to and engage with these activities as a daily classroom strategy?
3. What changes in vocabulary retention are observed after one month of implementation?

Accordingly, the study pursued the following specific objectives:

- a. To explain how routine-based activities support vocabulary retention.
- b. To examine young learners' engagement with the implementation of these activities.
- c. To determine the differences in vocabulary retention before and after the month-long intervention.

Exploratory Phase

The participants were 13 first-grade students who are learning English as a foreign language. As the prior students' context was unknown to the teacher-researcher, their former teacher participated in an interview in order to understand aspects of the students' learning during their previous school year. One of the most important ones was that students enjoyed English lessons when activities such as singing songs, playing interactive games, and using colorful flashcards were involved. Despite having these activities embedded in the lessons, students have the tendency to forget the vocabulary when reinforcement was not applied, which justified the need to implement a teaching strategy that is consistent, meaningful, and routine-based. Routine-based activities reinforce the words learned previously through regular drills and association techniques. Furthermore, the target participants are young learners who need to establish habitual learning acquired through repetition and familiarity.

To measure the level of knowledge about the twelve (12) words that refer to school supplies and as the target vocabulary, a pre-test was administered. In this test, students had to cross out the school supplies named by the teacher in all 12 cases. After applying the test, the results revealed that half of the students struggled to remember the words, signifying poor retention. Thus, an intervention was designed to teach and reinforce vocabulary through routine-based activities. Songs and flashcards were the teaching resources used in implementing routines to young learners. The repetitive nature of songs reinforces behaviorist theories, which capitalizes on the importance of fixing a word through drills and imitations. Similarly, flashcards served as scaffolds that provided the visual image that aided learners to remember the words, affirming Vygotsky's theory on the «Zone of Proximal Development».

Actual Action Research Phase

The intervention lasted four weeks, comprising 21 sessions, including the initial pre-test (one separate session), five sessions per week, as well as weekly assessments, observation protocols, post-tests, and a final interview. The weekly assessment refers to a set of teacher-made activities aimed at measuring the number of words learners remember in a week after the words were taught to them. All scores that learners obtained from the weekly assessment activities were added to determine the increment in their vocabulary.

To triangulate the data from weekly assessment activities, observation protocols were likewise used to document the behavioral processes of learners while engaging in routine-based activities. These protocols follow a template, and data are encoded after every lesson using descriptive and reflective notes. The data collected are analyzed through careful scrutiny and examination of prevalent, recurring, and significant words that emerged from the data. The use of interviews is another data collection method used during the exploratory phase, which was intended to determine the current vocabulary of learners and the class context, ensuring that the proposed intervention is appropriate and relevant. The appropriateness of the interview guide was confirmed by the interview through an open discussion of the possible questions that are important to the class context. These two tools – observation protocol and interview – produced qualitative data; thus, there is no need for a scoring procedure and piloting for validity, as the former is more appropriate in quantitative studies.

Each week followed a structured pattern to teach and reinforce the target vocabulary through routine-based activities during the initial and closing stages of the lessons. Five sessions were conducted per week. In session 1, two words were learned; in session 2, two additional words were taught that were cumulative with the previous ones and reinforced. In session 3, these patterns were repeated, as two additional words were introduced while the previous ones were reinforced; in session 4, all the words learned during the week were reinforced. Finally, in session 5, a weekly assessment was used to measure the students' retention level of the target vocabulary learned during the week.

Two routines were considered in this study. One applied at the beginning of the intervention, which consisted of an engaging song, «The Lion Sleeps Tonight» by The Tokens, whose lyrics were adapted to incorporate the target vocabulary used in this intervention. This song not only included lyrics in a video but also movements that students had to imitate while singing. The comprehension check routine consisted of using 12 flashcards that were placed on the floor. Each student had to go to the front of the class and either touch the school supplies named by the teacher or respond to the question, «What is this?» Throughout the intervention, observation protocols were used to gather descriptive and reflective notes about students' participation, vocabulary retention, and engagement.

At the end of the four weeks, a post-test identical to the pre-test was administered, and short individual interviews were conducted. The interview included three simple ques-

tions, accompanied by emojis (happy, neutral, sad), to allow students to express whether routines helped them remember vocabulary and whether they enjoyed the activities.

DATA ANALYSES

Pre-test and post-test data were used to compare students' initial knowledge of the target vocabulary with their retention after the intervention; the mean, minimum, and maximum values of both were included to achieve this goal. Likewise, the standard deviation of both tests was also included, aiming to indicate the variation of individual scores from the mean. The weekly formative assessments were used to monitor progress and determine whether students retained vocabulary from each week; the results were analyzed and illustrated in *Figure 1*.

Data was also collected from observation protocols, which were analyzed descriptively and reflectively. This information is summarized in *Table 2*, which includes the number of weeks, the target vocabulary, the remembered words, common difficulties, and key observations/ progress. Through these observations, students' engagement and confidence were analyzed over the weeks. Moreover, the final interview also yielded positive outcomes, as the students were asked to answer three key questions: whether the routines helped them remember the target vocabulary. In the final interview, students had to respond using emojis representing specific answers: a «happy face» for a positive answer, a «neutral face» for an impartial answer, and a «sad face» for a negative answer. All these data collection tools were used to determine the influence of routine-based activities on students' vocabulary retention, engagement, and confidence over the weeks.

RESULTS

The results of the intervention are presented by answering the research questions of this study.

Influence of Routine-Based Activities on Vocabulary Retention.

To address the question of how routine-based activities affect vocabulary retention, *Table 1* presents the pre- and post-test results, comparing the students' prior knowledge of the target vocabulary and their performance after the intervention.

Table 1. *Pretest and Post-test Scores on Vocabulary Retention*

Test	Mean	SD	Maximum	Minimum
Pre-test	6.62	2.03	10	3
Post-test	12	0.00	12	12

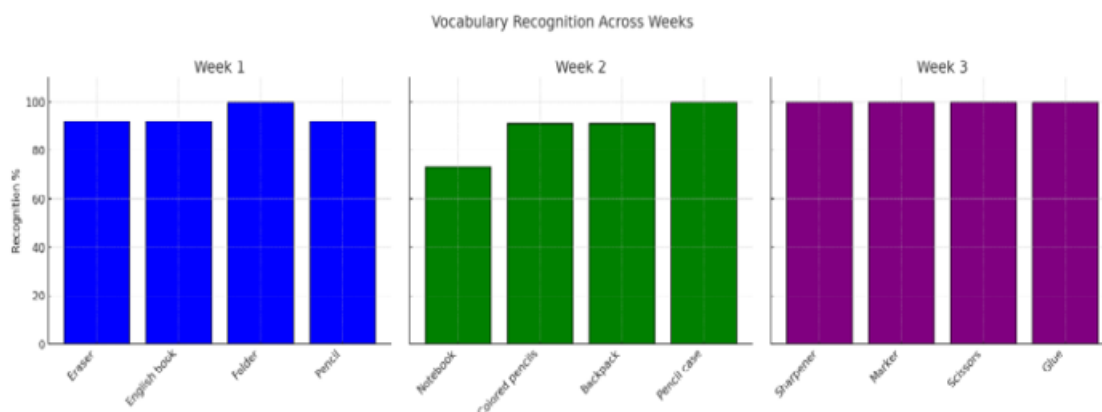
Note. N = 13 participants. SD = Standard Deviation.

The use of routine-based activities in the classroom led to improvements in students' vocabulary retention. These outcomes indicate that prior knowledge of school supplies was limited as evident in the mean pretest score of 6.62. After four weeks of the intervention plan, a post-test was conducted where students' mean score is 12, an increase of 5.38, demonstrating good retention of all twelve target words. Moreover, the SD score of the pre-test was 2.03, indicating a significant variability in students' initial vocabulary knowledge. In the post-test, the SD score was 0.00, which means that all students achieved a consistent score after the intervention.

Routine-Based Activities as Support for Vocabulary Retention.

To address the first sub-question, *Figure 1* illustrates the results gathered from weekly formative assessments, which show a significant progression in students' vocabulary retention over the weeks. The data also shows a consistent increase in the number of words from the first until the last week of the intervention stage.

Figure 1. Results from the Weekly Assessments



The observations, presented in *Figure 1*, also aimed to analyze students' progression not only in vocabulary retention but also in engagement and confidence over the course of the weeks, yielding positive results in all these aspects. Students gradually internalized the initial (warm-up song) and closing routine (comprehension check), which allowed students to reinforce the words progressively, leading to an automatic recall by the fourth week.

Students' Engagement with Routine-Based Activities.

Regarding the second sub-question, *Table 2* shows students' progress and engagement across sessions. The observations also revealed high levels of participation and enjoyment, especially when activities were gamified, and a steady move toward independent performance.

Table 2. Vocabulary Retention Progress Across Sessions

Weeks	Target Vocabulary	Number of Re-membered Words	Common culties	Diffi-	Key Observations / Progress
Week 1	Pencil, eraser, English book, folder	All	Manifested some pronunciation difficulties		Active participation, and engagement
Week 2	Notebook, colored pencils, pencil case, backpack	Recalled the following words: easy: backpack, pencil case difficult: notebook, colored pencil	Confusion with order of words Ex.pencil colored instead of colored pencils.		Improved pronunciation Increased participation
Week 3	Sharpener, marker, scissors, glue	All new words remembered.	Ongoing confusion with notebook and colored pencils during review.		Improvements in vocabulary retention Peer assistance extended during word completion to aid memory recall
Week 4	Reinforcement of all previous words.	Improved recall and pronunciation of all target words.	Only minimal distractions		Automatic recall and better pronunciation Improved retention. Increased confidence. Singing using target words initiated independently.

Table 2 summarizes the key information obtained from the observations, which demonstrated a significant change in students' vocabulary retention, engagement, and confidence throughout the weeks. During the initial part of the intervention, students were poorly engaged in the warm-up activity as this routine was unfamiliar to them. However, a significant increase in students' participation and engagement was observed throughout the sessions. Moreover, as the comprehension check became a friendly competition, students' participation also improved. Finally, difficulties encountered due to unfamiliarity and confusion with other words, as *notebook* and *pencil case*, were overcome and mastered.

Furthermore, through the final interviews, positive results were gathered, as most students answered affirmatively to three questions, confirming the use of routine-based activities as an effective way to learn vocabulary, working as an enjoyable teaching strategy, and allowing students to remember more words than before the intervention.

Vocabulary Retention After One Month of Classroom Implementation.

The results obtained from the pre- and post-tests, as illustrated in *Table 1*, demonstrate the effectiveness of implementing routine-based activities in the classroom, as they represent significant progress in their means, from 6.62 in the pre-test to 12 in the post-test. These results are affirmed in the final interview facilitated to the students after the month-long implementation. *Table 3* shows the responses of students after the final interviews, where they responded to the questions by selecting a happy emoji, which means yes, a sad emoji, which means no, and neutral emoji that signifies they are neither happy nor sad about the activities.

Table 3. *Student's Answers in the Final Interview*

Question	Yes	No	Neutral/Cannot decide
Student response on whether routine-based activities helped remember target words	11	0	2
Student response to whether they enjoy routine-based activities	11	1	1
Student response to whether they learn more words using routine-based activities	9	0	4

Note. N=13. Students were asked to express their answer by selecting any of three choices: happy, sad, or neutral face.

As shown in *Table 3*, the final interviews resulted in positive outcomes in relation to students' perceptions of routines. Out of 13 participants, nine students selected the «happy face» for all three questions (positive answer), indicating that they felt the routines helped them remember new English words, they enjoyed the activities, and they recalled more words than before.

However, some students responded neutrally and negatively to some questions. In question 1, two students responded neutrally. In question 2, one student had the same neutral response, while in question 3, four students gave a neutral response. Negative answers were extremely low, as one student chose this answer for question 2. The data show that most of the students had positive perceptions of the use of this teaching strategy, and only very few students experienced a moderate learning experience through the use of routine-based activities in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

Different data collection tools were employed to investigate the influence of routine-based activities on young EFL learners, which employed pre-tests, observation protocols, weekly assessments, post-tests, and final interviews, following the EAR cyclical process.

The Influence of Routine-Based Activities on Vocabulary Retention.

As observed in *Table 1*, a comparison between the results of the pre-test administered at the beginning and the post-test at the end of the intervention confirmed the effectiveness of routine-based activities as a teaching strategy in enhancing vocabulary retention, with an increment in the means from 6.62 in the pre-test to 12 in the post-test. Moreover, a set of few words was introduced in the application of this teaching strategy, which is one reason this intervention resulted in positive outcomes. The study of Peters-Sanders et al. (2020) and Coyne et al. (2022) reinforce this finding, where they emphasize the use of a small but meaningful set of words to be taught in the lessons. Through repetitive exposure, using a reduced number of words is key to achieving students' vocabulary retention over time. In EFL classes, teachers can prepare small sets of vocabulary banks which can serve as a scaffold and student-support materials, helping learners prepare for the words they are expected to learn on a daily basis.

Vocabulary Retention Through Structured Repetition and Predictable Exposure in Routine-Based Activities.

The implementation of continued exposure and predictable tasks in routine-based activities resulted in an effective teaching strategy, as shown in the values when a comparison is made between pre-test and post-test (*Table 1*), which confirmed the effectiveness of routine-based activities in retaining vocabulary. According to Sousa (2016), the use of distributed practice is key for vocabulary learning, as was confirmed in this study. The use of the two routines implemented at the beginning and end of the intervention in this study (warm-up song and comprehension check) helped students remember the words effectively and improve their pronunciation. Therefore, vocabulary retention is not the only aspect that can be enhanced, as pronunciation and language use can also be strengthened through the use of these routine-based activities. EFL teachers can integrate two consistent activities that reinforce the vocabulary learners are learning. Through lesson planning, teachers can embed the key words in the beginning and at the end to ensure that a connection is established, enabling learners to remember the words throughout the lesson.

Routine-Based Activities Result in Students' Engagement and Motivation.

Routine-based activities proved to be an effective teaching strategy in enhancing not only retention but also key aspects of confidence, engagement, and enjoyment. The positive result is due to the transformation of the classroom into a comfortable space that reduces discomfort and anxiety. Moreover, the predictability of the activities allowed students to anticipate the tasks and improve their responses to the instructions, which inevitably results in a well-managed classroom. Burden (2020) asserts that students' focus is improved when students are engaged and less anxious.

Despite the facility that routines provide to learners, some struggle with word recall. To address this, peer assistance was part of the lesson dynamics, where classmates helped the others remember by pronouncing the first syllable of the word, demonstrating that social interaction was also a key aspect in helping students retain the meaning of the words learned. Further, the finding reaffirms what Ho (2021) has emphasized regarding the role of peer interaction as key in fostering a supportive classroom.

Positive outcomes were also obtained from the final interviews, presented in *Table 3*, in which most students responded positively to all questions. However, a small group responded with neutral and negative responses, indicating that not all students, but rather a small number, had a moderate experience using this strategy. Therefore, the use of repetitive activities helped improve vocabulary learning (Sousa, 2016).

Focus and confidence were also increased through the use of predictable routines, which confirms Burden's (2020) study. Also, the use of routine-based activities works as an effective strategy in enhancing not only retention, but it also develops confidence and fosters enjoyment in English lessons.

Vocabulary Retention After One month of Routine-based instruction.

The implementation of routine-based activities after one month resulted in positive outcomes in students' vocabulary retention and confidence, as they were able to overcome challenging words encountered throughout the sessions, such as *notebook* and *colored pencil*, which were due to unfamiliarity and interference with other terms. This positive change occurred due to retrieval practice, as mentioned by Sousa (2016), where students constantly reinforce these words throughout the lesson. Moreover, educators need to understand first how memory processes work in vocabulary retention to choose the appropriate teaching strategy, including constant and significant practice to achieve this learning goal (Gordon & Lowry, 2024).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As the present study involved only 13 participants, future research can focus on a larger group of students to determine if the results are consistent. Similarly, administering a retention test after a considerable period, once the intervention has concluded, should be considered to determine whether students have retained the target vocabulary, as it was not considered in this study due to time limitations.

CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores the potential of routine-based activities as an effective strategy for enhancing English vocabulary retention among young EFL learners. The following conclusions are presented according to the research questions that guided the study:

1. Due to the positive results obtained from this intervention, routine-based activities can be seen as an effective way to retain vocabulary. This teaching strategy was applied for one month, during which young EFL learners participated. The post-test revealed high levels of retention of the 12 target words used in this study. Moreover, challenging words such as *notebook* and *colored pencils* were overcome throughout the intervention.
2. Students' engagement and confidence increased through the intervention, which was evident in classroom observations. Moreover, during the final interview, students reported that they were able to retain vocabulary effectively, enjoyed the routines, and remembered more words than before, due to the use of the warm-up song and comprehension check routines. This result demonstrated that routine-based activities helped students to feel more engaged and increased their confidence in the classroom.
3. After one month of routine-based activities implementation, different students' aspects

were improved. This teaching strategy not only helped students retain the target vocabulary but also strengthened their confidence, pronunciation, and participation during the lessons. Therefore, the use of predictable activities resulted in positive student outcomes in their learning.

This study indicates and provides evidences that routine-based activities, including songs, games, and visuals, proved to be effective not only for students' vocabulary retention but also for improving other aspects, such as pronunciation, engagement, and confidence. Through the findings of this study, EFL teachers can employ routine-based activities that help young learners retain and expand their vocabulary in a meaningful and engaging way.

CONTRIBUTOR ROLES

Gisselle Karina Molina Cabrera: Conceptualization, investigation, literature review, data collection, data analysis, methodology development, original draft writing, results interpretation, review, and editing.

Hazel Acosta Cadungog: Supervision, tutoring, methodological guidance, critical review, academic editing, validation of results, and final manuscript review.

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The authors state that there are no ethical implications associated with this study.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work presented.

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