

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: In the context of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Vietnamese primary education emphasizes both knowledge acquisition and competency development. Teaching words and sentences in Grade 3 is essential for enhancing students' linguistic competence but often proves abstract and less engaging. This study surveyed 14 teachers and 226 students in Thai Nguyen province to explore perceptions and practices of using learning games. Based on findings, the paper proposes several educational games designed in accordance with the 2018 General Education Program, aiming to foster student motivation and provide practical resources for teachers in Vietnamese language teaching.

KEYWORDS: Educational games, Vietnamese language teaching, words and sentences, grade 3, student motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of essential skills and qualities required in modern society. In accordance with Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW (dated November 4, 2013) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the 2018 General Education Program underscores the importance of innovating teaching methods to foster learners' motivation and competencies. At the primary level, learning motivation is particularly crucial, as students are transitioning from preschool—where play is their dominant activity—and the desire for play remains deeply embedded in their psychology.

In Vietnamese language education, the teaching of words and sentences plays a pivotal role in developing students' linguistic competence. However, this knowledge area is often abstract and may easily become monotonous. Therefore, identifying effective and appropriate teaching strategies has been a persistent concern among educators. This paper aims to design educational games for teaching words and sentences to third-grade students in Vietnam, with the dual purpose of stimulating students' learning motivation and supporting teachers in adopting innovative instructional practices that align with the requirements of contemporary educational reform.

2. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Basic Concepts

2.1.1. Games

There are many definitions of games. In this study, we adopt the perspective of Dang Thanh Hung, who defines games as “activities that are organized and carried out in the form of play, as play, or through play, such as learning through play, communicating through play, exercising through play..., and in essence, they are purposeful activities”. [3,9]

2.1.2. Educational Games

Educational games are defined as “games whose primary purpose is to educate and develop children's intellect” [cited in 2,12]. Accordingly, all games associated with teaching activities—whether as a teaching method, an instructional format, or a practice exercise, regardless of their content or specific characteristics—are considered educational games.

2.2. Current Situation of Using Educational Games in Teaching Words and Sentences in Vietnamese Language for Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

To examine the current situation of using educational games in teaching words and sentences to third-grade students in Vietnam, we conducted a survey with 14 teachers and 226 students from three primary schools in Thai Nguyen province: Nguyen Hue Primary School, Le Van Tam Primary School, and IRIS Primary–Secondary–High School.

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

2.2.1. Objectives and Content of the Survey

- To investigate Vietnamese teachers' perceptions of teaching through educational games;
- To examine the current practices of applying educational games in Vietnamese language teaching for third-grade students;
- To explore students' interest and engagement when participating in educational games.

2.2.2. Survey Methods

We employed interviews, questionnaire surveys (Anket), and classroom observations.

2.2.3. Survey Results

2.2.3.1. Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching through Educational Games

a. Perceptions of the importance of teaching through educational games

Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Teaching through Educational Games

Level of importance	Teachers' responses	
	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
Important	9	64.3
Moderate	4	28.6
Not important	1	7.1

From the survey results, it can be seen that the majority of teachers clearly recognized the importance of teaching through educational games (accounting for 64.3%). Only 7.1% of teachers considered this issue unimportant.

b. Teachers' perceptions of the role of educational games in teaching Vietnamese language to third-grade students

Table 2. Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of Educational Games in Teaching Vietnamese Language to Third-Grade Students

No	Role of educational games in teaching	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
1	Innovating teaching methods	14	100
2	Creating learning interest for students	13	92.8
3	Reinforcing knowledge through practice	11	78.6
4	Immediate application of acquired knowledge	9	64.3
5	Promoting students' activeness, independence, and creativity	12	85.7

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that teachers have an appropriate understanding of the role of using educational games in teaching Vietnamese language to third-grade students.

2.2.3.2. Current Practices of Using Educational Games in Teaching Vietnamese Language to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

Table 3. Frequency of Using Educational Games in Teaching Vietnamese Language to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

Frequency	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
Frequently	3	21.4
Occasionally	9	64.3
Rarely	2	14.3
Never	0	0

From the survey results, it can be observed that all teachers had used educational games in teaching Vietnamese. However, the frequency of application varied considerably. This indicates that although teachers are aware of the role of educational games in instruction, their practical implementation is not yet widespread and has not become a regular teaching method.

2.2.3.3. Students' Interest in Participating in Educational Games

Table 4. Levels of students' interest in participating in educational games

Level of interest	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
Very interested	212	93.8
Interested	10	4.4
Neutral	4	1.8
Not interested	0	0

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

The survey results show that all students expressed interest in educational games, with no cases reporting disinterest. This demonstrates that educational games are genuinely engaging for students when learning Vietnamese.

2.3. Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences in Vietnamese Language to Third-Grade Students

2.3.1. Foundations and Principles for Designing Educational Games on Words and Sentences in Grade 3 Vietnamese Language Teaching

2.3.1.1. Foundations for Design

a. Based on learning objectives

The Vietnamese primary education curriculum aims to form and develop essential qualities, general competencies, and subject-specific competencies, while also cultivating life values, learning habits, and study routines for students [1]. The design of educational games must be grounded in these objectives to ensure their usefulness and appropriateness for primary school learners.

b. Based on curriculum requirements and the content of teaching words and sentences in Grade 3 Vietnamese textbooks

The development of a system of educational games must also be based on the required learning outcomes of the curriculum as well as the content of teaching words and sentences in the selected Grade 3 Vietnamese textbooks. This ensures that the designed games are suitable and within students' capabilities. In this study, the Grade 3 Vietnamese textbooks from the Canh Dieu series were used as the foundation for designing the game system.

c. Based on the survey results of the current situation of teaching words and sentences in Grade 3 Vietnamese at several primary schools in Phan Dinh Phung ward, Thai Nguyen province

Students' cognitive levels vary significantly across the country. These differences are most apparent when comparing rural and urban students, or those from mountainous and lowland areas. Therefore, the design of the game system must take into account the cognitive levels of students in the surveyed areas to ensure that the games are both appropriate to their abilities and aligned with the curriculum requirements.

2.3.1.2. Principles of Design

a. Ensuring alignment with teaching content

The Grade 3 Vietnamese textbooks (Canh Dieu series) consist of four themes (Saplings; Community; Homeland; Shared Home) corresponding to 18 lessons. When designing educational games, it is necessary to base them on these four themes and 18 lessons so that the games closely align with lesson content. Only then can the games truly add value in consolidating and enhancing students' knowledge.

b. Ensuring clarity

Educational games are implemented to help students acquire or deepen their understanding of specific areas of knowledge. Therefore, their design must ensure clarity so that students can easily comprehend the rules and participate purposefully. This allows students' engagement in the games to achieve the intended educational outcomes.

c. Ensuring attractiveness

Attractiveness is a crucial factor that enables educational games to capture students' attention and foster learning motivation. To achieve this, games should be designed in a lively and diverse manner, incorporating visual elements such as illustrations, colorful learning materials, or engaging scenarios.

d. Ensuring feasibility

Feasibility is essential to guarantee that educational games can be effectively implemented in real classrooms. To this end, games need to be simple, easy to understand, and easy to organize. Requirements related to teaching aids, classroom space, or teacher support must remain within practical limits.

e. Ensuring competitiveness

Incorporating competitiveness into the design of educational games helps make lessons more dynamic and engaging. When games involve competition, students participate with enthusiasm and positivity, while also developing a sense of striving, overcoming challenges, and cooperating with peers.

2.3.2. Some Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences in Vietnamese Language to Third-Grade Students

2.3.2.1. Word Games

a. Word Identification Games

Word identification refers to the process of recognizing and distinguishing linguistic phenomena that have been or are being learned. Word identification games are designed to help students accurately identify linguistic items according to given requirements. To implement word identification games, teachers can organize the following activities:

(1) Game: "Squirrel Collecting Acorns"

- Objectives

+ Help students accurately identify types of words (nouns, verbs, adjectives).

+ Develop teamwork skills and quick thinking.

- Preparation

+ Word cards: cards containing words similar to those used in the exercises.

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

+ Classification board: a large board divided into three columns, each corresponding to one category: “Nouns”, “Verbs”, “Adjectives”.

+ Flags or bells to signal completion.

+ Description and Procedure

On the board, the teacher places posters with illustrations. The number of posters corresponds to the number of participating teams. Each poster depicts three baskets placed around many acorns, with each acorn containing a word. The teacher poses a task, asking students to line up; each student in turn runs to select a word card (acorn) that matches the requirement and places it in the appropriate basket. The team that selects the most correct words in the shortest time wins.

- Example

This game can be organized when teaching the lesson Sharing and Reading: First Day of School (Practice section) [4,7].

? EXERCISE

1. Sort the following words into appropriate groups:

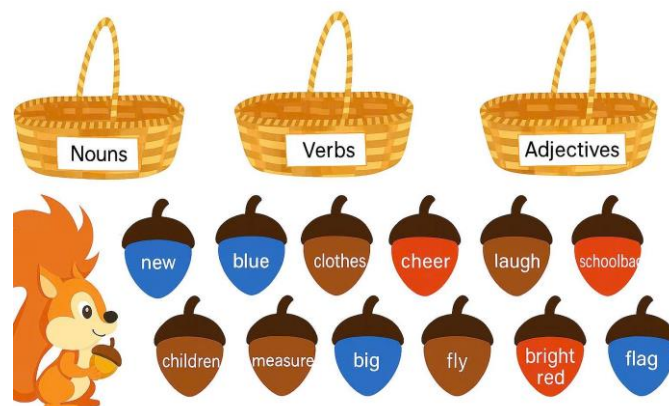


+ Preparation:

Prepare three A0-sized posters, each illustrating three baskets labeled “Nouns”, “Verbs” and “Adjectives”. Create word cards in the shape of acorns with the following words: *new, blue, clothes, cheer, laugh, schoolbag, child, measure, big, fly, flag, bright red*.

+ Procedure:

Step 1: The teacher introduces the game “Squirrel Collecting Acorns” and displays the posters.



Step 2: The teacher divides the class into three teams and instructs each team to line up in a vertical row.

Step 3: The teacher explains the rules of the game:

“Imagine yourselves as squirrels collecting acorns to place into the appropriate baskets. When I give the command “Start”, the first student in each line will run forward, pick one acorn, place it into the correct basket, and then run to the end of the line. The next student will continue in the same manner until I give the command “Stop”. The team that collects acorns quickly and accurately will be the winner”.

Step 4: Students participate in the game.

Step 5: The teacher and students evaluate the results of the game.

- Application

This game can be used either in the knowledge formation stage or in review activities related to nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

(2) Game: “Magical Golden Eggs”

- Objectives

+ Help students accurately identify different types of words.

+ Develop teamwork skills and quick thinking.

- Preparation

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

- + Golden egg cards: words printed on oval-shaped cards made of cardboard or hard foam. Each “egg” may be attached with a magnet or a handle.

- + Two “large bird nests”: two decorated baskets, containers, or magnetic boards with labels.

- + Flags or bells to signal completion.

- Procedure:

On the board, the teacher attaches posters of “large bird nests”. The number of posters corresponds to the number of teams. In the middle of the classroom, the teacher places golden eggs, each containing a word. The teacher poses a task and asks students to line up in vertical rows. At the signal, students from each team take turns running to pick one golden egg containing a word that matches the answer, then return and place it into their team’s nest. When time is up, the teacher and the class review the words in each team’s nest. The team with the highest number of correct and fastest answers is the winner.

- Example

This game can be organized when teaching the lesson *Reading: Sharing Joy* (Practice section) [4,75].



- + Preparation

Golden egg cards: Words such as *mutual support*, *village*, *clan*, *solidarity*, *neighborhood*, *school*, *classroom*, *affection*, *help*, *love* are printed on oval-shaped cardboard or foam eggs.

Two “large bird nests”: Two baskets attached to the board and labeled as Nest 1: “Community-related words” and Nest 2: “Words expressing community sentiments.”

Playground setup: Chalk lines clearly mark the “egg garden” (where the eggs are placed at the center of the classroom).

Additional materials: Stopwatch / whistle / cheerful background music.

- + Procedure

Step 1: Divide the class into teams, each consisting of 4–6 students, standing in line at the starting point.

Step 2: In the middle of the classroom is the “golden egg garden,” where 10 eggs containing words are randomly placed.

Step 3: The teacher explains the rules:

When the teacher gives the command “Start!”, the first student from each team quickly runs to the garden, selects one egg, reads the word aloud, and places it into the appropriate nest.

If the word belongs to the category “Community-related words,” it is placed in Nest 1.

If the word belongs to the category “Words expressing community sentiments,” it is placed in Nest 2.

Step 4: After placing the egg, the student runs back and tags the next teammate, who continues the process.

Step 5: The teacher and students evaluate the results together.

- Application

This game can be applied either during the introduction of new knowledge or in review activities related to nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

b. Vocabulary Systematization Games

Vocabulary systematization refers to the accumulation of words so that they can be used with ease. Accordingly, vocabulary systematization games require students to perform tasks that help them accumulate vocabulary based on specific criteria.

To assist students in systematizing their vocabulary, teachers can organize the following games:

(1) Game: “Word Train”

- Objectives

- + Help students accumulate vocabulary;

- + Develop teamwork skills and quick thinking;

- + Create a lively and enjoyable learning atmosphere.

- Preparation

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

- + Word cards: Prepare many blank cards for students to write words on.
- + Adhesive tape or magnets to attach word cards to the board.
- + Posters for students to create a train.
- Description and Procedure

On the board, the teacher places posters depicting trains. The number of posters corresponds to the number of participating teams. Each poster shows a train with empty carriages, with each carriage corresponding to a word. The teacher poses a question, and students in groups must think and fill in the carriages with words that fit the answer. The team that creates the longest and most accurate train wins.

- Example

This game can be organized when teaching the lesson *Reading: Washing Clothes* (Practice section) [4,26].

PRACTICE

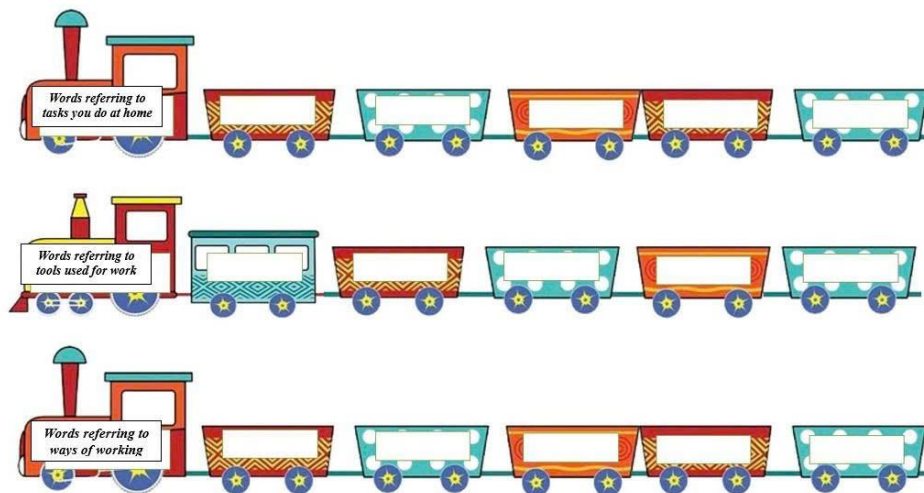
1. Find at least 3 words for each group below:
 - a) Words referring to tasks you do at home:
washing clothes,...
 - b) Words referring to tools used for work:
gloves,..
 - c) Words referring to ways of working:
quickly,..

- Preparation

Prepare three A0-sized posters, each illustrating a train. At the beginning of each carriage, labels are attached with the following prompts: “*Words referring to tasks you do at home,*” “*Words referring to tools used for work,*” and “*Words referring to ways of working.*” Additional blank carriage-shaped cards are provided for students to fill in with words.

- Procedure

Step 1: The teacher introduces the game “Word Train” and displays the posters.



Step 2: The teacher divides the class into three teams and distributes blank train carriages to the students.

Step 3: The teacher explains the rules:

“Each group has two minutes to discuss and fill in their words on the train carriages. After two minutes, you will attach your team’s carriages to the board. The team with the longest and most accurate train will be the winner.”

Step 4: Students participate in the game.

Step 5: The teacher and students evaluate the results of the game.

Extension: The teacher may invite other groups to comment on their peers’ work and suggest additional words.

- Application: This game can be used for vocabulary expansion lessons.

(2) Game: “Word Treasure”

- Objectives

+ Help students accumulate vocabulary;

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

- + Develop teamwork skills and quick thinking;
- + Create a lively and enjoyable learning atmosphere.
- Preparation
- + Word cards: Prepare many blank cards for students to write words on.
- + Illustrations of treasure chests or boxes for storing words.
- Description and Procedure

On the board, the teacher places pictures of boxes, each labeled with a word group to be found. The teacher distributes blank cards to groups (with group names marked on the corner of each card). Within three minutes, groups discuss and complete the task, then attach their results to the appropriate box. When time is up, the group with the largest number of correct words wins.

- Example

This game can be organized when teaching the lesson Reading: The Threshold (Practice section) [4,45].

PRACTICE

1. Find words or phrases similar in meaning

reflect

far away

childhood

- Preparation

- + The teacher prepares blank word cards for students to write on (with group names marked in the corner).
- + Illustrations of boxes or treasure chests labeled with the keywords: *reflect*, *far away*, *childhood*.

- Procedure

Step 1: The teacher introduces the game “Word Treasure” and attaches three treasure chest illustrations to the board, each labeled with one keyword: *reflect*, *far away*, *childhood*.

Step 2: The teacher divides the class into groups and distributes a number of blank cards to each group (with group names marked on the corner).

Step 3: The teacher explains the rules:

“On the board, there are three treasure chests, each labeled with one keyword: *reflect*, *far away*, *childhood*. Within three minutes, your group should discuss and write synonyms for these keywords on the cards (each card must contain only one word). After writing, students take turns running to the board and placing their cards into the correct chest. When time is up, the group with the largest number of correct words will be the winner”.

Step 4: Students participate in the game.

Step 5: The teacher and students evaluate the results together.

Extension: The teacher may invite other groups to comment on their peers’ work, or ask students to create sentences using the words their group has found.

2.3.2.2. Sentence Games

In the Grade 3 Vietnamese curriculum, the learning requirements for sentences consist of two main aspects: recognizing different types of sentences (declarative, exclamatory, imperative) and applying this knowledge to construct sentences. Sentence recognition is often integrated into reading comprehension lessons, where teachers highlight sentences within texts to facilitate students’ understanding. As this content is not particularly challenging for students and is already incorporated into other learning activities, we do not focus on designing games for sentence recognition. Instead, the system of games primarily targets practicing and developing the ability to apply knowledge—specifically, sentence construction—so that students can use language more flexibly and accurately in both learning and everyday communication.

In the previous section, we categorized word games into identification and vocabulary systematization. In the Grade 3 Vietnamese textbooks, there is also an activity aimed at vocabulary activation. However, vocabulary activation requires not only memorizing and categorizing words but also using them to construct sentences and express ideas in specific contexts. Therefore, we chose to integrate vocabulary activation into sentence games rather than establishing a separate category. This approach ensures coherence in the game system and aligns with the objectives of Grade 3 Vietnamese instruction, simultaneously developing vocabulary and sentence construction competence.

To practice sentence-related knowledge, teachers may organize the following games: (1) Game: “Musical Gift Box”

- Objectives

- + Reinforce knowledge of sentence types previously learned; develop linguistic reflexes and confidence in speaking before the class.

Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

- + Enhance students' powers of observation, imagination, and expressive ability.
- + Create a joyful and lively classroom atmosphere.
- Preparation
- + One gift box (containing slips of paper with questions or prompts for sentence construction).
- + A speaker or music-playing device.
- + Small rewards (stickers, pencils, candy, etc).
- Description and Procedure

The teacher plays music and hands the gift box to a student. While the music is playing, students pass the box around the classroom. When the music stops, the student holding the box opens it, selects one slip, and reads the task aloud to the class. The student answers immediately. If the answer is correct, the student receives a reward; if incorrect, the student forfeits the turn, and the game continues. The activity proceeds until all questions are completed or the allotted time expires.

- Example

This game can be used when teaching the lesson Reading: Homeland River (Practice section) [5,17].

- Preparation

The teacher prepares a gift box containing slips of paper with questions such as:

a. Imagine yourself as the child in the poem. Write an exclamatory sentence expressing your feelings about the beauty of the river.

b. Imagine yourself as the child in the poem. Write an exclamatory sentence expressing your feelings about the chanting voices on the river.

c. Imagine yourself as the child in the poem. Write an exclamatory sentence expressing your love for the homeland river.

Additional preparation includes music equipment and small rewards (stickers, pencils, candy, etc).

- Procedure

Step 1: Students have 30 seconds to think about possible responses.

Step 2: The teacher introduces the game "Musical Gift Box" and explains the rules:

"I have prepared a gift box containing slips with sentence prompts or questions. While the music is playing, you will pass the box around in a circle. When the music stops, the student holding the box opens it, picks one slip, reads the prompt aloud, and answers immediately. If the response is correct and complete, you will receive a reward. If incorrect or unanswered, you lose the turn, and the box continues. Remember: you cannot hold the box while the music is playing, and you may not repeat another student's response. Whoever provides a correct answer will receive a gift".

Step 4: Students participate in the game.

Step 5: The teacher and students evaluate the results together.

- Application

This game can be adapted for practicing exclamatory, imperative, and declarative sentences; patterns such as Who is what? Who does what? Who is how?; or for constructing sentences with given words.

3. CONCLUSION

Educational games play an important role in teaching Vietnamese at the primary level, as they not only create a lively and engaging learning environment but also help students consolidate and expand vocabulary, develop thinking skills, and improve communication abilities. Particularly for the Grade 3 content on words and sentences, educational games are especially necessary to enable students to acquire knowledge naturally, effortlessly, and effectively.

This study focused on designing several educational games for teaching words and sentences to third-grade students in Vietnam. The games were constructed based on the objectives of the 2018 General Education Program and the psychological characteristics of primary school students, with the aim of fostering motivation, enhancing learning effectiveness, and developing linguistic competence. We hope that the proposed games will serve as useful references, supporting teachers in organizing instruction on words and sentences, thereby contributing to improving the quality of Vietnamese language teaching at the primary level in Vietnam.

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Designing Educational Games for Teaching Words and Sentences to Third-Grade Students in Vietnam

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