

**SEBHA UNIVERSITY
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ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

**THE IMPACT OF USING GAMES IN TEACHING
VOCABULARY TO LIBYAN EFL PRIMARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS**

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**ACADEMIC YEAR
2019-2020**

Dedication:

This work is dedicated to the dearest persons, the first teachers whose presence brought life to everything and whose absence brought hurting pain. The persons whose words of encouragement are still in my memory.

I dedicate this work also to my beloved precious parents, the symbol of persistence, and to my brothers and sisters.

A final heartfelt word of acknowledgement is addressed to: my friends for their help, encouragement and sympathy.

Acknowledgement:

Our thanks are equally addressed to Dr. Mayouf Ali and Dr. Abdurrahman A Hamza for their precious and priceless advice.

Special thanks are due to the students (sample) for their immense help and participation in the accomplishment of this study.

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary learning has always been a major concern for those who want to learn a second language, but most of Libyan EFL students usually feel bored in vocabulary classes because they have not changed their learning habits: such as writing words on their notebooks, trying to learn by heart or learning passively through teachers' explanations. To help students find language classes, especially vocabulary lessons more interesting and to achieve more from games, I conducted practical research to find the answer to the question, "Do games help students to learn vocabulary more effectively, and if so, how?". This study was conducted to find out whether engaging students in a word games can affect vocabulary development of learners or not. The study was conducted at Al-Qordabeya School in Sebha. A mixed method was used to conduct the study (a questionnaire and interview). It was found that students are demanding a new way of learning vocabulary, and they themselves are in search of a new way of learning this subject.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It is the element which links the four skills of language learning (speaking, listening, reading and writing all together). In order to communicate well in a foreign language, students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately. There is an old and prevalent perception that learning occurs well only in a restrained, tense and oppressive environment. Many teachers believe that learning a language should take place in a formal environment and if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really teaching (Lee, 1995). Contrary to that belief, we can apply some teaching strategies like games to reduce the stress level among the students.

Games create an active atmosphere. This can sometimes be noisy and apparently disorganized learning setting (Evans, 1979). Such scene can be threatening to most teachers. There is always the urge to fully control all the students' activity. This claim arouse some questions to be taken into consideration: Does not a such tense learning environment cause stressful environment in which students do not feel convenient to interact and communicate with their peers and also teacher? Is it possible for learners to learn a language and enjoy themselves at the same time? To increase the amount of vocabulary, media is to be used. One of these media is game. According to (Hornby, 1995) a game is an activity that you do to have some fun. This project was set to unveil the effects of games on language learning on the aspect of vocabulary.

Games can provide the students more concentration in learning vocabulary because these students will never feel that they are forced to learn. Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input

more likely (Richard-Amato, 1988). They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (Hansen, 1994). They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson. Games can be the media that will give many advantages for both teachers and students.

The usefulness of games is to attract the student to learn English because it is fun and it can make them want to have experiment, discover and interact with their environment (Lewis and Bedson, 1999). Some experts have also figured out characteristics of games that make vocabulary learning more effectively. Lee (1996) lists several main advantages when games are used in the classroom, including "a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class", "motivating and challenging", "effort of learning" and "language practice in the various skills".

Ersoz (2000) claims that games are highly appreciated due to their amusement and interest. Teachers can use games to help their students practice more their skills of communication. Besides, Uberman (1998) also states the helpful role of games in vocabulary teaching after quoting and analyzing different opinions of experts. And also, Uberman (1998) observes the interest of her students in learning through games. She believes that games are a way to help students not only enjoy and amuse with the language they learn, but also practice it incidentally. To be short, games can be considered useful and effective tools that may be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of games in learning vocabulary is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and effective.

In Libyan EFL context, students usually acquire new vocabulary through new words in their textbooks or when given by teachers during classroom. Libyan learners find many new words in their text books

and then ask the teacher to explain the meanings and usages. Many Libyan learners do not want to take risks in applying what they have learnt. Students may recognize a word in a written or spoken form and think that they already "know the word", but they may not be able to use that word properly in different contexts or pronounce it correctly.

1.1. Aims of the study:

This study aims at:

- 1) Investigating the effectiveness of using language games in learning vocabulary.
- 2) Investigating the main difficulties that Libyan EFL learners face while engaged in vocabulary classes.

1.2. The Hypothesis of the Study:

It is hypothesized in this study that using games in teaching vocabulary can play an effective role to ease the procedure for both the teacher and the students.

1.3. Statement of the problem:

Even though students realize the importance of vocabulary when learning English language, most Libyan EFL students learn vocabulary passively as they consider the teacher's explanation of vocabulary boring. Libyan EFL learners have nothing to do in a vocabulary classes, but to listen to their teachers. In addition, they focus on vocabulary primary meaning and ignore all other functions of the words.

1.4. Research questions:

- 1) Is learning vocabulary through language games effective?
- 2) What are the difficulties that face Libyan EFL students while learning vocabulary?
- 3) What are Libyan EFL students' attitudes towards vocabulary learning?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction:

Games play a very important role in learning vocabulary. Some teachers think that language games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in classroom since games sometimes have been considered for its one element that is fun. In fact, games can provide ELLs (English Language Learners) more than that (Angkana Deesri , 2002). Among several strategies used to improve student's proficiency such as visual aids, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), drama, role-play and soon games are another useful strategy to promote student's vocabulary proficiency (Richard & Amato, 1996). According to Nguyen Thithanh and Khuatthithunga (2003), students seem to acquire new vocabulary more quickly and retain it better when it is applied in a relaxed and comfortable environment (i.e. while playing English Second Language games).

2.2. What is a game?

A game is an organized activity that usually has the following properties: a particular task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players and communication between players by spoken or written language (Richards and Platt, 1992, p. 153). Game is also defined as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun" (Hadfield, 1990, p. 5).

2.3. Kinds of games used in language teaching and learning:

Different scholars have different classification of games. Lee (2000, p. 65) classifies games into ten kinds: structure games, vocabulary games, spelling games, pronunciation games, number

games, listen-and-do games, read-and-do games, games and writing, miming and role-play and discussion game. However, McCallum (1980, p. 74) categorizes games for language learning into seven kinds: vocabulary games, number games, structure games, spelling games, conversation games, writing games, and role-play and dramatics. From these two divisions, only five of them can better suit the vocabulary classes which are: vocabulary games, structure games, writing games, reading games, and games for developing speaking and listening skills. Each kind of game focuses on a language component or a skill, so when choosing games, one of the factors that teachers have to consider is the aim of the lesson. Hadfield (1990, p. 8) said that games can take one of the following forms:

(A) Information gap. Students ask their partners to get missing information to complete the task or card they have or together solve a problem.

(B) Guessing games. The player with the information deliberately withholds it, while others guess what it may be.

(C) Search games. Players must obtain all or a large amount of the information available to fill in a questionnaire or to solve a problem.

(D) Matching games. These games involve matching pairs of cards or pictures. Everyone must find a partner with a corresponding card or a picture.

(E) Matching-up games. Each player in a group has a list of opinions, preferences, wants or possibilities. Through discussion and compromise, the group must reach an agreement.

(F) Exchanging games. Players have certain articles or ideas which they wish to exchange for others. The aim of the game is to make an exchange that is satisfactory to both sides.

(G) Collecting games. Players need to collect cards in order to complete a set.

2.4. The role of games in vocabulary learning and retention:

In order to learn and retain new words, learners should participate in different task-based activities in their classroom and such activities also include vocabulary games which especially focus on helping learners develop and use words in different contexts by making the lessons enjoyable. Therefore, it is necessary to explore whether students learn vocabulary effectively through games and how they learn it. Many experts of language teaching methodology agree that playing games is a good way to learn vocabulary, especially in communicative language teaching classes. Games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways.

First, using games is a good way to increase exposure to vocabulary which enhances students' vocabulary acquisition. Learning is a process by which "information is obtained, stored, retrieved and used", therefore, the teacher needs to provide initial encoding of new words and then "subsequent retrieved experiences" (Rubin, 1987, p. 29). A research suggests that if learners see or use a word in a way different from the way they first met it, then better learning is achieved. According to Schmitt (2000, p. 116), amount of exposure can affect second language vocabulary acquisition.

A research in vocabulary acquisition reported by Nation in 1990 reveals that students require at least five to sixteen exposures to a new word before learning it. Also, Bunch (2009, p. 1) points out that English language learners will benefit from a variety of activities aimed at increasing exposure to key vocabulary. Besides, Laufer (1997, pp. 140-142) points out that vocabulary acquisition is related to the effect of repetition on learning. It can be said that repetition is one of the most effective ways to learn new words. Similarly, according to Carter and McCarthy (1988, p. 67), new words are forgotten if they are

not recycled in some way and make it into long-term memory. In order to learn vocabulary, words have to be recycled numerous times. In fact, providing incidental encounters with words is one method to facilitate vocabulary acquisition (Sökmen, 1997, p. 237). Through regular recycling, students can be given opportunities to meet the same vocabulary, embedded in different contexts, languages and activity types. This not only improves their recall and develops memory processes, but also extends their understanding and associations of vocabulary in an ever expanding network of meaning and use. As games provide another encounter with the target words, they have the advantage of being fun, competitive and consequently memorable (Sökmen, 1997, p. 242).

Methodologists agree that games can help students review vocabulary effectively. Memory plays a key role in vocabulary learning and the benefits of revision and repetition have been clearly demonstrated in studies of vocabulary learning (O'Dell, 1997, p. 276). Besides, Ellis (1997, pp. 134-138) shares the same view that repetition is a strategy for consolidating vocabulary. He adds that games lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant and entertaining way (pp. 134-138). Similarly, McCallum (1980, p. 78) points out that games can function as reinforcement, review and enrichment. In fact, games can lend themselves perfectly to quick bursts of revision. Using some of the games, the teacher can revise a massive amount of vocabulary and grammar in a few minutes. Clearly, students have more chance to be exposed to vocabulary through games. According to Hadfield (1999, p. 91), in order to retain a word, students have to go through three distinct processes: (1) fix the meaning of the word in their mind, (2) make the word their own, (3) use the word to communicate with others. He adds that games can help the learner through these three processes. It can be said that games are very effective in helping students increase exposure to vocabulary.

Second, games can maintain students' motivation in vocabulary learning because they are amusing and interesting (Uberman, 1998, p. 18). In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better (Uberman, 1998, p. 18). Similarly, games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily (Nguyen and Khuat, 2003, p. 11). They also add that games usually involve friendly competition, and they keep learners interested; these create the motivation for learners of English to get involved and participate actively in the learning activities (p. 11). Games also help learners recall material in a pleasant and entertaining way (Uberman, 1998, p. 20). For many children between four and twelve years old, language learning will be the key motivational factor; games can provide this stimulus (Lewis, 1999, p. 101). Using games helps the students to relax; they remember things faster and better. Moreover, games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely (Richard-Amato, 1988, p. 147). As Nguyen and Khuat (2003, p. 11) put it, students tend to learn and retain new vocabulary better when it is applied in a relaxed environment like playing vocabulary games. Especially, labeling and displaying pictures, depicting new vocabulary is helpful, especially with beginners. Matching words to pictures is a useful review exercise (Bunch, 2009). In short, games are very effective in motivating students in learning vocabulary.

Third, games can provide students with intensive and meaningful practice of language (Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby, 2005, p. 11). In fact, most vocabulary games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms (Lee, 1995, p. 78). Hadfield (1984, p. 127) shares the same view that games can provide an opportunity for real communication and bridge the game between the classroom and the real world. Language games thus allow the use of meaningful and useful language which is used in real contexts (Ersoz,

2000, p. 85) and are able to provide a chance for pupils to use the language that they have learnt .

It can be concluded here that games are motivating and effective techniques. They enhance the chance of vocabulary exposure. In addition, they provide students with meaningful practice of language learning. Therefore, this research would suggest that games can play a significant role in the retention of vocabulary. Accordingly, Lee (1995, p. 78) suggests that games should not be regarded as "activities filling in odd moments when the teacher and his/her class have nothing better to do" (p. 3). They have to be at the heart of teaching a language in general and vocabulary in specific (Uberman, 1998, p. 20).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1. Introduction:

This study is held at Al-Qordabeya elementary school in Sebha, where twenty students are chosen as a sample for the study. The students are at the age of eleven, twelve girls and eight boys. All these students share the same culture and background.

3.2 Research Method

A mixed method was used to conduct the study.

3.3 Research Instrument

In order to gather data, two different techniques were used: As a first step, I set up a questionnaire comprises of eight questions and provided to the students chosen for this investigation. Secondly, students are to be interviewed and discussed in terms of game influence vocabulary learning.

3.4 Research Sample

The sample of the current study was collected from Al-Qordabeya primary school. The collected data were

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Analysis of the questionnaire:

After collecting data, I found students interested and informative in their responses. The following is the students' answers to the questionnaire as well as the analysis.

The first question is about learning habit.

Q1-How do you learn new vocabulary?

- a) Memorize words by heart (7/20) 35%.
- b) Write down the words in your notebooks (13/20) 65%.
- c) Use a bilingual dictionary (0/20) 0%.

When being asked about the ways to acquire English new words, 35% of the students replied that they try to learn them by heart, 65% of the students said that they write new words down in their notebooks and try to study them several times, but no one of the students seemed to use the dictionary to get new words.

The second question is about the students attitude towards word games .

Q2- How do you feel when taking part in these word games?

- a) Relaxed and interested (20/20)= 100%.
- b) Stressful (0/20)= 0%.
- c) Bored (0/20)= 0%.

100% of the students answered that they felt relaxed and interested

The third question is about how the students find games while learning new vocabulary.

Q3- Do you think that through games you can learn vocabulary more interestedly than you did through other methods such as writing new words down, learning by heart, reading them loudly several times and so forth?

a) Yes (15/20)= 75%.

b) No (5/20)= 25%.

75% of the students answered that through games they can learn vocabulary more interestedly than they did through other methods such as writing new words down on the papers again and again, learning by heart, reading new words loudly many times and so forth whereas 25% found the opposite.

The fourth question is about whether a student motivated and engaged in the games, liked it and made efforts to win. Q4- Did you want and try to be a winner during the game play?

a) Yes (13/20)= 65%.

b) No (7/20)= 35%.

65% of the students expressed during game play they did their best to be a winner, but 35% of the students did not want to win the game.

The fifth question:

Q5- Do you think that games are highly motivating and entertaining and they can give timid students more opportunities to express their opinions and feelings in English?

a) Yes (15/20)= 75%.

b) No (5/20)= 25%.

75% of the students replied that games motivated them and it allowed more students to express their opinions and feelings, whereas 25% answered that games did not motivate them .

The sixth question:

Q6- Do you remember new words faster and better due to the relaxed atmosphere created by playing games?

a) Yes (17/20)=85%.

b) No (3/20)= 15%.

85% of the students confided that they could remember new words faster and better due to the relaxed atmosphere created by playing these games. Students tend to learn and retain new vocabulary better, when it is applied in a relaxed environment like playing vocabulary games. In fact it has been proved that an interested and involved class, learning through several fun-filled English language games takes in 100% of the lesson and retains 80% of it.

Q7- Did you learn new words from your classmates and partners?

a) yes (18/20)= 90%.

b) No (2/20)= 10 %.

90% of the students said that they could learn new words from their classmates and partners who joined them in games. To a certain extent, each person has his/her own range of vocabulary, but nobody can know all the new words. A member of class said that some new words she knew, but her friends did not know and vice versa. Through games she could learn many new words from her classmates. And either did her classmates.

In the last question, we asked the students about their opinions in applying word games in foreign language classes whether they should be used or not.

Q8- Personally, do you think that games should be applied in all foreign language classrooms?

a) Strongly agree (1/20)= 5%.

b) Agree (18/20)= 90%.

c) Strongly disagree (0/20)= 0%.

d) Disagree (0/20)= 0%.

e) Not sure (1/20)= 5%.

After finishing the games and from questionnaire collected, we found 5% of the students strongly agreed and 90% the students concurred that those kinds of games should be applied in all foreign language classes. While strongly disagree and disagree got 0% and 5% of the students seemed to be not sure about this.

4.2. Analyzing data collected from the interview:

In this section I am going to analyze data which were collected from interviewing the students.

For the purpose of studying the effectiveness that games may bring to students, I firstly asked some students to know whether they find games beneficial for them in learning new words or not.

15 students agreed that through games they can learn vocabulary more interestedly than they did through other methods, such as writing new words down on the papers again and again, learning by heart, reading new words loudly several times and so forth.

Secondly, When being asked about the ways to acquire English new words, 14 students replied that they often tend to consult their

teacher to give them the meaning, write new words down in their notebooks and then try to learn them by heart. However, they may have a risk not to actually learn what the words mean because of the tiredness and boredom after looking up. four students said that they just take a look and read new words silently to themselves. Meanwhile, the rest told us that they write new words down and read loudly several times or just take a look on them sometimes.

Thirdly, When being asked about the problems that students often have in vocabulary learning, 7 students told us that they do not learn vocabulary very often because of boredom.

Fourthly, we also wanted to know whether they consider vocabulary as the most essential element of communication. It was found that 14 students concurred that vocabulary is an important factor because it is like bricks to build a solid house of language which is necessary for clear and efficient communication in any situation of conversing. They also added that words are our tools to communicate with others, as well as explore and analyze world around us. Therefore, "it stands to reason that language learners with a limited vocabulary will be handicapped in their educational progress".

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

learning vocabulary has been considered a boring subject for a long time and the traditional way of learning vocabulary by mere copying and remembering has shown to be less than effective. Meanwhile, games are also seen as a time-filling activity in most English classrooms. It is believed that games are just for fun and they have very little effect in teaching and learning. However, the research reveals that games contribute to vocabulary learning as they give students a chance to learn, practice and to review the new language taught in a pleasant atmosphere.

To sum up, It was found that students are demanding a new way of learning vocabulary, and they themselves are in search of a new way of learning this subject as well. Under such circumstances, games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. First, games bring in relaxation and fun for students thus help them learn and retain new words more easily. Second, games usually involve friendly competition and they keep learners interested. These create the motivation for learners of English to get involved and participate actively in the learning activities. Third, vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom, and enhance students' use of English in a flexible, communicative way.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire:

Q1-How do you learn new vocabulary?

Q2- How do you feel when taking part in these word games?

Q3- Do you think that through games you can learn vocabulary more interestedly than you did through other methods such as learning by heart, reading new words loudly many times, writing them down and so forth?

Q4- Did you want and try to be a winner during the game play?

Q5- Do you think that the games are highly motivating and entertaining and they can give timid students more chances to express their opinions and feelings in English?

Q6- Do you remember new words faster and better due to the relaxed atmosphere created by playing games?

Q7- Did you learn new words from your classmates and partners?

Q8- Personally, do you think that games should be applied in all foreign language classrooms?

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