THE EFFICIENCY OF STUDYING WORDS USING GAMES

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Abstract. *Students in Uzbekistan frequently find vocabulary lectures tedious owing to established learning practices. These behaviours include putting words on paper, practicing rote memorization, and passively taking in knowledge from instructor explanations. To improve the engagement and effectiveness of language classes, particularly vocabulary instruction, we performed action research to investigate the effects of games on vocabulary acquisition. Our research focuses mainly on the solitary component of games. We used games in our own courses, watched other instructors' strategies, and interviewed both educators and students. We evaluated the usefulness of games for vocabulary acquisition by eliciting students' emotions and sentiments. The research findings show that games can help children improve their vocabulary-building skills.*

Key words. *Efficiency, Studying, Words, Games, Learning, Vocabulary, Interactive, Engagement, Retention, Educational, Gamification, Language.*

Problem

In foreign language learning, vocabulary plays a crucial role. It serves as the bridge connecting the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. To communicate effectively in a foreign language, students must acquire a sufficient vocabulary and understand how to use words accurately. Despite recognizing the significance of vocabulary, many Uzbek students adopt passive learning approaches. Several factors contribute to this:

1. **Teacher-Centric Explanation**: Students find the teacher's explanations about word meanings, pronunciation, spelling, and grammar dull. Consequently, they merely listen during vocabulary lessons.

2. **Narrow Focus**: Students often limit vocabulary learning to understanding the primary meaning of new words, overlooking other aspects.

3. **Textbook Dependency**: New vocabulary typically comes from textbooks or teacher-led classroom discussions.

4. **Risk Aversion**: Learners hesitate to apply their knowledge actively. While they may recognize words in written or spoken form, using them appropriately in different contexts or pronouncing them correctly remains a challenge.

Recently, communicative language teaching (CLT) has gained traction in Uzbekistan. Our experience confirms its effectiveness in language education. CLT encourages active participation through individual, pair, and group activities, enabling students to practice language skills meaningfully. [Akilli, G. K. 2007: 1-20]

Literature review

In the realm of English language learning, students often face the obstacle of unfamiliar vocabulary. To tackle this challenge effectively, students are advised to participate in various task-based activities in the classroom. These activities, including guessing tasks, descriptive exercises, and conversational interactions, are crucial for vocabulary acquisition. Among them, vocabulary games are particularly noteworthy for creating a dynamic learning environment that improves students' usage and understanding of words in different contexts, all while making the learning process enjoyable.

Traditionally, vocabulary has been integrated with other language skills like speaking, listening, reading, and writing, rather than being treated as a separate subject. However, the traditional method often involves memorizing word lists or relying on bilingual dictionaries, leading to superficial understanding and limited

retention. Scholars like Decarrico (2001) warn against passively memorizing words without understanding them, emphasizing the significance of encountering words in meaningful contexts for effective learning. Nation (2000) emphasizes the incremental nature of vocabulary acquisition, stressing the importance of repeated exposure to words in diverse contexts for deep understanding and retention. [Computer games theories for designing motivating educational software 2008: 181-199]

Furthermore, some students tend to depend heavily on teachers for word meanings and grammatical functions, taking a passive approach in their learning. While this method may be helpful initially for grasping basic word forms, it often results in a shallow comprehension of vocabulary, overlooking the nuances of meaning and usage in real communication settings.

On the other hand, communicative language teaching (CLT) promotes active student involvement in meaningful tasks to enhance communicative skills. Scholars like Newton (2001) support this approach, which empowers students to actively manage their vocabulary while honing their communication skills. In CLT classrooms, games serve as a valuable tool for teaching vocabulary, enabling teachers to create immersive environments where students engage in language use, information exchange, and expressing opinions [Annetta, L. A. 2010: 105-112]

The advantages of integrating games into vocabulary teaching are numerous. Lee (1995) outlines several benefits, such as breaking away from the monotony of traditional language classes, boosting motivation and providing challenges, and offering comprehensive language practice across different skills. Ersoz (2000) praises the fun and interest generated by games, which enhance communication skills. Uberman (1998) highlights the effectiveness of games in teaching vocabulary, as they engage students and facilitate language practice in an enjoyable way.

In conclusion, games are essential and effective tools for teaching vocabulary. By incorporating elements of fun and challenge into lessons, games

not only increase engagement but also create more effective and enjoyable language learning experiences.

Method

In order to comprehensively gauge the efficacy of employing vocabulary games as a pedagogical tool, our study aimed to delve into the intricate nuances of students' experiences and the progression they attain through this innovative approach. Specifically, our research sought to ascertain whether games could serve as a potent catalyst in not only alleviating the perceived tedium associated with vocabulary acquisition but also in fostering a genuine interest among students, particularly in the Uzbek context where vocabulary learning is often viewed as mundane rather than stimulating.[Annetta, L. A., Minogue, J., Holmes, S. Y., & Cheng, M.-T. 2009: 74-85]

To realize our objectives, our methodology entailed a multifaceted approach that encompassed an exploration of students' perceptions and attitudes towards vocabulary games, as well as an assessment of the tangible benefits they derived from such interactive learning experiences. Our strategy involved the implementation of diverse game formats within our classroom settings, facilitating an in-depth examination of students' reactions to this novel instructional technique. Concurrently, we endeavored to identify any challenges or obstacles encountered during the instructional process, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of vocabulary games as a pedagogical tool.

Moreover, adhering to established research methodology and principles, we supplemented our primary data collection efforts by observing classes conducted by seasoned educators at SSIFL (Samaraknd State Institute of Foreign Languages), reviewing instructional materials and lesson plans devised by other teachers, and engaging in interviews with both faculty members and students. This triangulation of data sources served to enrich our perspectives and provide valuable insights into the diverse dynamics at play within the realm of vocabulary instruction through games.

Over the course of a rigorous two-week period, we meticulously implemented an array of vocabulary games within the classrooms of the Distance Education Center (DEC), diligently documenting learners' reactions and assessing the impact of these interactive sessions on their vocabulary acquisition journey. Additionally, we conducted oral interviews with DEC students to glean deeper insights into their expectations, challenges, and progress vocabulary learning through games. Furthermore, our observational forays into CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) classes at HUFS afforded us invaluable opportunities to witness firsthand the implementation of games in a different instructional context, further enriching our empirical understanding of their efficacy. [Barab, S. A., Gresalfi, M., & Ingram-Goble, A. 2010: 39, 525-536]

In a bid to capture the nuanced nuances of students' experiences, we administered post-class surveys to solicit their candid feedback and reflections on the efficacy of vocabulary games in enhancing their learning outcomes. Notably, meticulous attention was devoted to designing the survey questionnaire to ensure clarity of purpose and relevance to the research objectives.

Moreover, our research endeavor was augmented by the invaluable insights and guidance provided by experienced educators, who offered invaluable inputs on designing effective vocabulary games, crafting instructional materials, and navigating potential challenges. Additionally, we engaged in triangulation by interviewing a student who had previously conducted similar research, thereby broadening our scope of inquiry and enhancing the robustness of our findings.

Results

Upon conducting observations of CLT teachers' classes, interviewing teachers and students, and reflecting on our own experiences of using games in our classes, we have identified several findings that can be beneficial for teaching and learning vocabulary. These findings will be presented in two subsections: students' expectations and attitudes, students' progress. Students' expectations and attitudes

When asked about their methods of learning English vocabulary, most students at the Distance Education Center mentioned that they simply copied new

words provided by teachers or looked them up in the dictionary. Many of them expressed frustration with this traditional approach, noting that it was boring and ineffective. They also expressed a desire to learn vocabulary in more engaging ways. In particular, they had questions about how to remember words and their meanings, use words in different contexts, and retain vocabulary effectively.

Students' progress

The majority of students (17 out of 20) were enthusiastic about participating in vocabulary games, demonstrating a willingness to engage and compete. They particularly enjoyed games such as "Hangman," animal squares, and advertisement poster competitions. Additionally, students actively collaborated in group-based games, including those who were typically quiet in class.

These findings shed light on the potential effectiveness of incorporating vocabulary games into the learning process.

Using games for language training might lead to pupils speaking in their native language rather of the language they are learning. Using games to practise communication skills in a foreign language might make it difficult to manage the usage of first language (L1) in classes, according to my experience and feedback from HUFS instructors. When employing games in English classes, it's natural for pupils to choose their native language over English. Even advanced students at the Distance Education Centre communicated in their first language. Dash (2002) thinks that this technique should be authorised.[Aldrich, C. 2005: 219]

CONCLUSION

In Uzbekistan, vocabulary study is frequently seen as tedious, with the old approach of rote memorising proving useless. Similarly, games have traditionally been seen as simply time fillers in English schools, with little recognised teaching value. However, our study shows that games may considerably help with vocabulary acquisition when they allow students to learn, practice, and review English in an engaging setting. We discovered that pupils are hungry for a novel approach to vocabulary instruction, actively exploring different learning techniques.

Under such circumstances, games have demonstrated their effectiveness in various ways. Firstly, they introduce an element of relaxation and fun, facilitating easier retention of new words. Secondly, games often incorporate friendly competition, maintaining students' interest and motivation. Thirdly, vocabulary games bring real-world contexts into the classroom, enhancing students' English language use in a flexible, communicative manner.

Hence, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be underestimated. However, to maximize the benefits of vocabulary games, it is crucial to choose suitable games. Considerations such as class size, proficiency levels, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and classroom settings should all be taken into account when selecting and implementing games.

In conclusion, learning vocabulary through games offers an effective and engaging approach that can be applied in any classroom setting. Our research suggests that games serve not only as a source of enjoyment but also as a valuable tool for language practice and review, ultimately contributing to the improvement of learners' communicative competence.

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