

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING VOCABULARY

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Abstract: Efficiency of the games is considered in article of teaching of English and study of the dictionary.

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According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures to further improve the learning of foreign languages” on December 10, 2012 since 2013/2014 academic years learning of foreign languages, mainly English, step by step in all territory of the republic began with the first classes of comprehensive schools in the form of game lessons and lessons of informal conversation.[1] Thus the question we began to examine is, "Do games help students learn vocabulary effectively and if so, how?"

In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. As Hammer states “If language structure makes up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and flesh”[4]. It is one element that links the four skills of 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. Even though students realize the importance of vocabulary when learning language, most students learn vocabulary passively due to several factors. First, they consider the teacher's explanation for meaning or definition, pronunciation, spelling and grammatical functions boring. In this case scenario, language learners have nothing to do in a vocabulary learning section but to listen to their

teacher. Second, students only think of vocabulary learning as knowing the primary meaning of new words. Therefore, they ignore all other functions of the words. Third, students usually only acquire new vocabulary through new words in their textbooks or when given by teachers during classroom lessons. For example, learners find many new words in a text and then ask the teacher to explain the meanings and usages. Forth, many 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.

In recent years, communicative language teaching (CLT) has been applied in our republic and from our own experience; it has shown its effectiveness in teaching and learning language.

CLT is an approach that helps students be more active in real life situations through the means of individual, pair and group work activities. It encourages students to practice the language they learn in meaningful ways. In a CLT classroom, playing vocabulary games is one of the activities which require students to actively communicate with their classmates, using their own language.

Learners of English have to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary during their language acquisition. In order to learn and retain new words, learners should participate in different task-based activities in their classroom whether it is a guessing task, a describing exercise or conversation making. 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.

Traditionally, vocabulary has not been a particular subject for students to learn, but has been taught within lessons of speaking, listening, reading and writing. During the lesson, students use their own vocabulary and are introduced

to new words provided by the teacher and classmates which they apply to classroom activities. For many learners of English, whenever they think of vocabulary, they think of learning a list of new words with meanings in their native language without any real context practice. A number of learners may share the same experience of looking up words in a bilingual dictionary to find their meanings or definitions when they encounter new words. They may even write down lines of new words without any idea of the real use of them in context. Working this way, after a short period of time, many learners may find out that learning vocabulary in lists does not satisfy themselves, and they think the cause for it is just their bad memorization. Research and publications have shown that this is not a very effective way to study. Unlike the traditional method of learning and teaching, in a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, learners are required to take part in a number of meaningful activities with different tasks. This is to improve learners' communicative competence by encouraging them to be a part of the lessons themselves. This approach can enable learners to manage their vocabulary meaning and develop their communicative skills at the same time. Many experts of language teaching methodology also agree that playing games is a good way to learn vocabulary, especially in CLT class. With the use of games, the teacher can create various contexts in which students have to use the language to communicate, exchange information and express their own opinions. Motivation is one of the essential factors in language learning. Lightbown and Spada stress the importance of motivation. They emphasize that "The principal way that teachers can influence learners' motivation is by making the classroom a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, and engaged in the activities"[5]. Motivated learners have a better chance of learning vocabulary successfully; unmotivated ones will have a lesser chance of success. Thus, in order to enhance learners' learning of vocabulary, they need to be motivated to play a game or to complete a task, and with the enjoyment achieved, learning the lexis occurs smoothly [6].

Therefore, learning new vocabulary through enjoyable and out of the ordinary ways may assist the children to learn vocabulary. Accordingly, teachers should employ vocabulary games that stimulate the students and entice them to participate. Teachers should consider games which are appropriate to students' age, cultural background and interests, and teacher also should consider activities where students can experience success. According to Bradley [2] games have some characteristics that are advantageous to language learners as follows:

First, games engage all students in the learning process. When students play games in pairs or groups, they have the opportunity to recognize and appreciate the contributions of others and use team-building skills. Some classroom games focus on individuals working to win against all other peers in the class. This type of game works well with students who are highly motivated and competitive.

Second, games provide an opportunity for collaboration and cooperation. Classroom games provide an opportunity for students to collaborate and cooperate with each other, while working towards a common goal - winning. In some games, students are paired or grouped, which may lead to peer tutoring and the use of cooperative skills in order to win. They may not realize that they are actually learning, but they are working together towards a common goal.

Third, games provide an enjoyable learning experience. Creating a fun and enjoyable learning environment is a large first step toward motivating students.

In summary, games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of vocabulary is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and effective.

Making learning vocabulary more active, sometimes games create problems for both students and teachers as well. Games cannot be successful if the teacher does not explain the tasks and roles of students clearly in playing games. If students do not understand the games' rules they may feel

embarrassed. Using games in the classroom sometimes fails due to the lack of cooperation among members of the class. Games require all students' involvement and they promote friendly competition, therefore, it is very important that students have a cooperative attitude. Another issue related to using games for language teaching is while playing games, students usually speak in their mother tongue to discuss instead of the language they are learning.

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.

Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However, in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is essential that suitable games are chosen.

Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account. Actually, games create a fun learning environment, add motivation when students' motivation shrinks, and promote team learning and collaborative skills. Being motivated by the relaxed and hilarious atmosphere, young learners are willing to take part in the learning process in a subconscious manner. Teachers should recognize that games are also a form of learning. In spite of the heavy schedule to fulfill on time, teachers should sometimes let their students relax with games after a long period of hard study.

This is not a waste of time, but it can energize their mind and encourage them to study better. Games, in fact, are not games only, but a good means of

education. By playing games, students can both relax their mind and review or practice things that they have just studied. In fact, games do not take much time to play, so teachers can make use of spare moments to let them play. Especially, learning English vocabulary using games has an important role for elementary teachers and students because they have strong and good motivation to deepen English language. Game use should be considered as central to instructional planning as children acquire knowledge through playing. For young learners, games should be used in a short amount of time with dynamic activities suitable for their psycho-biological characteristics.

Second, in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is essential that games must be well chosen. Various kinds of games can be used to help young learners recollect vocabulary, so the teacher assumes responsibility for finding out the most suitable games for his class as well as involving learners in searching interesting games and sharing them with their peers in the classroom. Byrne points out that “the more different games are used, the more motivated students become”[3].

In conclusion, learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms. The results of this research suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence.

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