

THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE GAMES TO ENHANCE VOCABULARY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the usage of games to practice vocabulary in the teaching of English to young learner. Teaching vocabulary through games was chosen as the focus area to enhance the interest of young learners to learn communication. Firstly, through the observation during course of my teaching practice at EFLU, I learned about usage of vocabulary and cultivate the interest in the mind of young learners through the games.

The study was conducted with twenty-nine students in a junior college. According to my observation of how vocabulary is taught in colleges, it relies on drilling the vocabulary to get the students to produce the correct pronunciation of words. Other strategies such as implementing games are very occasionally used to teach vocabulary; however, they are only used for a limited to me. Using games is considered time consuming, so teachers prefer to use drilling as an immediate way of teaching and practicing vocabulary. In English class, students are encouraged to speak in English when they answer, and while they interact with their classmates. Translation is generally avoided, but it is sometimes used to clarify difficult linguistic concepts, and also to clarify meaning.

Keywords: Games, vocabulary, learning, teaching, communication.

There are two main approaches to vocabulary teaching in some schools or colleges: the grammar translation method and the audio-lingual method. The first method focuses more in memorizing lists of vocabulary for translation tasks and for final assessments. The main feature of this approach is that lists of vocabulary are learnt to illustrate grammatical rules. The other method is the audio-lingual approach, which focuses on attention to pronunciation and intensive oral drilling.

These two methods focus on the learning of words in isolation from their contexts. For example, one lesson from the Grade Six course book, English for native speakers, includes widely different lexis from widely different contexts for students to learn e.g. ‘angry’, ‘hear’, ‘husband’ and ‘address’. The main criticism of this is that vocabulary can’t be learnt in isolation; that vocabulary items don’t have one fixed meaning; and that each word holds from fifteen to twenty meaning. Thus, vocabulary items from different contexts are harder to learn, because they cannot be easily taught together. Nunan (1991) suggests that ‘when teaching new vocabulary, we should begin by teaching the new item in context, but at a later stage learners should be given the opportunity of dealing with the words out of context’.

Word memorization is important in language learning, and memorization is helped when words are recycled regularly. Vocabulary development is a continuous process, where learners meet the words many times in their learning to increase and deepen their knowledge and their use of words in the foreign language (Cmeron,2001). It is also learned with opportunities to memorize the words effectively, more than if they just in thinking about the words and making decisions and about them allow learners to remember the words effectively. As Thornbury (2202) states, ‘To ensure long-term recall and retention, new knowledge should be integrated to old/existing knowledge. i.e. They need to be placed into working memory e.g. being compared, combined, matched sorted, visualized and re-shuffled, as well as being repeatedly filed away and recalled. Therefore, students need exposure to a variety of activities that challenge their thinking and promote their decision making.

Through effective interaction children are in a position to be exposed to comprehensible input; that is, language they understand. Children can be exposed to such input through interactive activities, as they provide learners with the opportunity to practice the language with other children. Similarly, Vygotsky (cited in Lightbown and Spada,1999) claimed that language is developed by interacting

with others, and children cannot develop it alone. They also use resources such as their facial expression, body language dramatization, repetition and so on (Peregoy and Boyle,2001). Therefore, teachers should organize times when students can interact cooperatively to practice the words in meaningful context.

Motivation is one of essential factors in language learning. Lightbown and Spada (1999) 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, engaged in (the) activities. 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 (Moon, 200). Therefore, learning new vocabulary, through enjoyable and out of the ordinary ways may assist the children to learn vocabulary. Accordingly, teachers should employ new vocabulary. Accordingly, teachers should employ new vocabulary games that stimulate the students and entice them to participate. Teacher should consider games which are appropriate to students’ age cultural background and interests, and teacher also should consider activities where students can experience success (Lightbown and Spada,1999). \

In light of the importance in the literature of both active involvement of learners in the learning of lexis in context, and the importance of recycling, my teaching strategy for the purposes of this action research task was to try to use games to teach and practice vocabulary in order to contextualize the words and to recycle vocabulary. In order to assess the results of this strategy, I used three research tools; interviews, observations and a reflective journal. I used these three tools to collect data and to reflect on my teaching to ensure the consistency of gathering the information and to have a clear idea about how the opinions and thought have changed after implementing the activities, my mentor teacher and peer observers were taking notes on their behavior. I also took notes while they were doing the activities, and in my reflective journal, I jotted down the informal conversations I had with teachers and with students.

In my action research, I tried to ensure ethical treatment by telling each individual who was observed, interviewed or quoted that they would be anonymous and the information would be used to fulfill the research purpose only, and it would not affect them negatively the participants were clearly informed about the action research process; they were informed that they would be observed during the implementing of the action and they would be interviewed afterward. The documents were sent to parents, teachers, peers and the school principal to ensure their individual rights were recognized. The participants were informed that they were going to be observed and interviewed to gain more data to answer research questions. The teacher responsible for the group was informed that the implementation of my strategy would not negatively impact on learning time.

Having implemented the strategy of using games to teach and to recycle vocabulary, and having collecting the data through the interviews, three main themes emerged:

- Using games to practice and recycle vocabulary seems to increase words memorization
- Using games to practice and recycle vocabulary seems to foster student interaction.
- Using games to practice and recycle vocabulary seems to enhance student motivation.

After implementing the games and activities to practice vocabulary, and after recycling words through the games every two weeks, it seems that students' ability to memorize the words has become more efficient. Through my observations of students, and especially when they had their regular revision of the previous lessons, I noticed their increased ability to recall the words.

Another theme which emerged from the study is that effective interaction occurs through using games and activities. Moon (200) states that "(interaction) is the main source of language input". Through my observation, I noticed that while students completed the games and activities, they talked about the activity and how they can do it, but rarely heard them chat with peers. "I was listening to their conversations and I was hearing the target language being used a lot" I noted in my observation, my observation is supported by my mentor teacher and my peers' observations, who commented that students talked with each other about the games, and they clarified complicated things. This is also supported by the students' interviews in which most of them have said that they

talk about the activity, whether asking their classmates what to do, or asking what a specific word means, “I talk with my friends about the games or about new words. Sometimes I ask my friends what we have to do”. According to my overall data, it seems that the games played in the lesson enabled students to assist each other with how they can complete them, clarify difficult points, translate difficult meanings, or share their ideas about the topic.

Using games to practice vocabulary improves learners’ ability to memorize the words effectively. Games provide comprehensible input while learners interact in the group, allowing students to clarify meaning of words in such context. The use of games also enhanced students’ motivation to learn vocabulary. This might be because the students have experience new methods of teaching, as they have been used only to learning the new language through drilling the vocabulary. The strategy I adopted also allows them to interact with peers, which is also a new experience for them since they are used to teacher-centered methods for the whole of their learning experience. The games also provided a challenge, where they need their concentration to get the tasks done which strengthens students’ mental work. Such activities were also new to students’ experience, and they think carefully to the right answers. The current English course book for Grade Six groups different words from different contexts in lesson, which forces the teacher to use drilling to teach the vocabulary. However, after using games to teach vocabulary, I can say that teachers can vary their methods of teaching. So, I recommend that teaches try using vocabulary games as well as drilling. I also recommend that teachers consider recycling words regularly-for example, every two weeks or after each unit-through the use of games as was as drilling.

To summarize, it was found that using games and activities to practice vocabulary enhance students’ ability to memorize words; encourages student interaction; and enhances student motivation. Furthermore, the whole process of conducting this action research and reading about vocabulary teaching and learning has contributed to my professional development in terms of providing me with knowledge of the varied current issues and strategies in teaching vocabulary. It has really enriched my theoretical background, and enhanced my ability to teach vocabulary effectively.



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