The Effect of Games on Learning Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT: Vocabulary learning has always been a major concern for those who want to learn a second language. The present study aimed at determination of effect of games on vocabulary gain of students. For this, two groups of students were chosen as control and experimental groups. The control group was exposed to textbook teaching between pretest and posttest; however, the experimental group was taught by games. Although both groups made noticeable progress after training program, there was no significant difference between the groups.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Games, Learning

INTRODUCTION

In learning a foreign language, Vocabulary plays an important role. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together (Thanh Huyen & Thi Thu Nga, 2003). According to Ghada sari students learning a foreign language – most of the time – tend to forget or misuse new words. This (forgetting and misusing) is due to many factors the most important of which are:

- Words are not properly stored in student's minds.
- They are not practiced enough.
- They are not related to students own experiences and interests.

Thus, 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 EFL and ESL student's more than that. (AngkanaDeesri, 2002). In fact, games can provide EFL and ESL student's more than that. (AngkanaDeesri, 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 language proficiency. (Richard –Amato, 1996). According to Nguyen Thi Thanh and Khuat Thit Thu Nga (2003), student's seemed to learn new vocabulary more quickly and retain it better when it was applied in a relaxed and comfortable environment such as while playing ESL games. Deesri(2002, cited in Byrne 1995) gave the definition to games as a form of play governed by rules. They should be enjoyed and fun. They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities, but a way of getting the learner to use the language in the course of the game.

Literature review

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 specially focus on helping learners develop and use words in different contexts by making the lessons enjoyable (Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen, 2003).

There are two main approaches to vocabulary teaching used in the UAE: the grammar translation method and the audio – lingual method. The first method focuses more on memorizing lists of vocabulary for translation tasks and for final assessments. The main feature of this approach is that illustrate grammatical rules. The other method is the audio – lingual approach, which focuses on attention to pronunciation and intensive oral drilling. (Osha Saeed Al Neyadi, Cited in Richards and Renandya, 2002).

These two methods focus on the learning of words in isolation from their contexts. Decarrico (2001) states that words should not be learnt separately or by memorization without understanding; moreover, learning new words is a cumulative process, with words enriched and established as they are met again. (Thanh Huyen, 2003)
Fun ESL games are a great way to revive student's interest in the class and often also help them absorb and retain more information than if they are simply studying to pass a test or complete an assignment. (Adopted from Shelly Vernon). The games are a form of teaching which may be used in circumstances where ordinary approaches are not well tolerated, When attention is hard to get and harder to keep. (Minoo Alemi, 2010, cited in Nicolson and Williams, 1975).

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. (adopted from Wright, Betteridge and Buck by, 1984).

To implement games in English class, teachers should consider numerous factors. One is choosing appropriate games to a group of learners which depend on number of students in class, level of age, level of language proficiency, duration and the content, and difficulties of language. In addition, teachers should further consider how to implement games to class. (Adopted from Amonrat Chirandon, Chonlada Laohawiriyanon, Anchana Rakthong, 2010).

According to Gairns and Redman (1986), there are three techniques used in the presentation of new vocabulary item. The first one is visual techniques including mime, gestures, and Visual such as flash cards, Photographs, black board drawings, wall charts, and regalia. The second one is verbal techniques: (1) use of illustrative situation, (2) use of synonym and definition, (3) contrasts and opposites, (4) scales, and (5) examples of the type. The last one is translation. It is considered a quick, easy, and effective way of conveying the meaning of vocabulary. (Luu Trong Tuan, 2012)

Phillips (1993) states "the best way to learn vocabulary is when the meaning of the word is illustrated for example by a picture or real object". Ghada Sari lists several main advantages when games are used in the classroom, including:

- Games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily.
- Games usually involve friendly competition, and they deep learners interested.
- Games are highly motivating and they give students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings.
- Vocabulary games bring real word context into the classroom.

In summary, games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes.

**Research Question**

Based on what mentioned above this research addressed the following question: Does the use of word games have positive effect on learning vocabulary?

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Participants**

30 girl students from first-grade junior high school were selected to take part in this study. The participants were divided into two groups, one experimental and one control group. The age of the participants in both the experimental and control group was fifteen.

**Instrument**

A vocabulary test made by the author was used for pre and post tests to measure the participant's vocabulary gains from the training program. This test consists of 20 items with four alternatives.

**Procedure**

Before the experiment, a pre-test was administered to the participants. 30 minutes were allowed for students to complete the 20-item test. Then the experiment was conducted. All conditions in both experimental and control groups were the same but the control group receives no treatment. I used word games in eight separate sessions and each session was thirty minutes. I taught one class by using the text book method and one by using games.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Tables 1 and 2 depict the marks gained by control and experimental groups before running the training program (pretest). As it can be seen, the highest mark was 8, which was lower than even half of overall mark.

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Tables 3 and 4 show the marks gained by the subjects after they were administered the training program. As it can be seen, significant differences were detected between the marks gained by the subjects following administration of the training program.

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Table 3. Marks gained by the control subjects in posttest.

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Table 4. Marks gained by the experimental subjects in posttest.

Different marks gained by students before and after use of training program are depicted in Figures 1 and 2 for control and experimental groups, respectively. It is clearly seen than the subjects made a great progress in vocabulary knowledge following exposure to the training program.

Table 5. Group Statistics.

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<th>Student</th>
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<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
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<td>1.41421</td>
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Figure 1. Comparison of the marks gained by control students before and after the training program.

Figure 2. Comparison of the marks gained by experimental students before and after the training program.
None of the subject was able to exceed even half of the overall mark before use of training program; however, all the subjects gained the marks higher than 15 except for one who gained 15. This clearly shows the wit effect of the training program on vocabulary knowledge of the subjects. It should be noted that no significant differences were found between control and experimental groups. Therefore, games and textbooks were found to exert rather same effect on knowledge gain of the students.

This is consistent with what Wright, Betteridge and Buck (1984) found in their study. They indicated that 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 (Wright, Betteridge and Buck, 1984).

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at determination of effect of games on learning vocabulary. It used a pretest and also a posttest to measure the effect games may have on vocabulary knowledge of subjects. After analyzing the obtained data, it was concluded that the training program significantly boosted vocabulary knowledge of the subject, even more than twice. However, no significant difference was found between use of textbooks and games to boost the vocabulary gain as both programs made significant progress in the subjects. Future studies are directed toward determination of effect of other materials (e.g. films, audio stories, etc.) on vocabulary knowledge of students. It should be noted that my study was limited by students’ age group and time considerations.

REFERENCES