The Effect of Using Word Games on Primary Stage Students Achievement in English Language Vocabulary in Jordan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of using word games on primary stage students' achievement in English vocabulary in Marj Al Hamam Primary school for girls and Al Baraa' School for boys in Amman in Jordan. To achieve the purpose of the study, a pre/post-test was constructed to measure students' level in English vocabulary. The test consisted of thirty items on English language vocabulary. The sample of the study consisted of 158 first grade students; (76) male students and (82) female students during the first semester of the academic year 2013/2014. The subjects of the study were distributed into four groups (two female groups experimental and control, and two male groups; experimental and control). The experimental groups were taught English vocabulary using games while the control groups were taught using the traditional way of teaching using pictures and memorization. The subjects were 39 male students for the experimental group and 37 male students for the control group, while the female students for the experimental and control group were 42 and 40 respectively. Descriptive statistical analyses were used (means and standard deviation) for the pre and post- tests of students' English vocabulary. Comparison statistical methods were used (Two Way ANOVA) analysis of variance to make a comparison between the control and the experimental groups and gender variable (male and female). The findings of the study indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the post- test between the control and the experimental groups in favor of the experimental group, and there was no statistically significant difference in the students' achievement due to gender. The researcher concluded with recommendations to enhance the effect of using word games for teaching English vocabulary on students' achievement in English vocabulary such as conducting further studies on other populations and for a longer period time.

Keywords: Word Games, English Vocabulary, Students Achievement

Introduction

The role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is important that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account.

Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful.

One of the techniques that can be used to teach vocabulary is word games that students would work on over a longer period of time. Of course the criteria for selecting words should be considered carefully since it is not the case that all words can be taught through word games. However, care should be taken to select those words which convey key concepts, are of high utility, and relevant to the bulk of the content being learned, and have meaning in the lives of the students. Another important issue in that restricting the number of words students are expected to learn will help them learn words meanings at a deeper level of understanding, which can be considered an important principle of sustained vocabulary growth.

The use of word games also addresses specific learner needs. This would mean that, for intermediate and advanced learners, traditional techniques for teaching vocabulary might be given a lower priority. Yet the use of word games is an area often neglected in the teaching of vocabulary.

Over the last decade books for teachers and students have focused on ways of organizing, practicing, and presenting new vocabulary to make accessible and memorable to the students. Word games, and the way in which we can increase student awareness of it has perhaps been paid less attention that it deserves (Lazar, 1996).

Teachers have long recognized and used students' inner feelings to play as a means of encouraging them to learn. Some scholars reported the successful use of games when teaching French to elementary students. Learning activities such as puzzles and games form an essential part of learning. "Playing with words can be linked to playground tennis or cricket or to any other practice game: it is a necessary preliminary to efficiency. For beginners at, say, cricket, you play with a soft ball and you bawl underarm, gently and straight; later on you cease to play with a soft ball and you bawl quite hard, with the occasional spinner or off-break" (Nicolson and Williams, 1975, p.1). It is therefore important that the game should be adjusted to the students' linguistic ability.

Importance of Games

Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce, and manipulate the target language. Games have proven to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways:

*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 keep learners interested.

*Vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom and enhance students' use of English in a flexible, communicative way.

*Games are highly motivating and they give students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings.

*Games add diversion to the regular classroom activities," break the ice", but they are also used to introduce new ideas.

Games are often associated with fun. While it is true that games are usually fun, one must not lose sight of their pedagogical value, particularly in second language teaching (Wright, Betteridge and Buckby 2002:1).

Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely. In addition, they are often highly motivating, relevant, interesting and comprehensible (Richard- Amato, 1995:147). Games are sometimes used in classrooms to develop and reinforce concepts (e.g., colors, shapes, numbers, word definitions), to add diversion to the regular classroom activities, and even to break the ice.

An effective user of games in the language classroom is not necessarily the teacher who has a long list of them in his head, but someone who has really thought about them and knows their ingredients and how they can be varied to call forth different activities and skills from the players. A teacher who understands a game in this way is much more likely to be able to find or create that will help his students to learn something as they play (Rixon, 1991).

Sari (2006) Among the many ways of making learning more effective, games are thought as useful tools for such comprehension.

There are many factors to consider while discussing games, one of which is the appropriacy. Teachers should be very careful about choosing games if they want to make them profitable for the learning process (Uberman, 1998:21). If games are to bring desired results, they must correspond to either the student's level, or age, or to the material that is to be introduced or practiced.

The role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is important that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account (Sari, 2006). Games contribute to vocabulary learning if they give students a chance to learn, practice and to review the English language in a pleasant atmosphere. They 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 (Nguyen and Khatu, 2003). Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied.

Statement of the Problem

The researchers noticed that in Jordanian schools students find difficulty in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in general and learning English vocabulary in particular

One of the most difficult aspects of learning a foreign language, particularly in an EFL context, is the retention of vocabulary. Vocabulary learning plays a major role in English language learners' success. Some Teachers believe that the number of new vocabulary terms introduced at any one time should be limited. The standard method of presenting up to 20 or more new vocabulary words that students are expected to learn at a given time is not an effective way to help the learners develop vocabulary (Gersten and Baker, 2000).

Seeing that vocabulary learning is a problem for Jordanian students, the researchers decided to investigate the effect of using word games as a strategy on the achievement of primary stage male and female students learning English as a foreign language in Amman in Jordan.

EFL specialists often justified the use of games with reference to the motivation that they can provide for the students. According to Allen (1983), adolescents and adults may enjoy games as much as children do and, if the purpose of a game is explained to them, they will not feel that it is childish. In games, "language use takes precedence over language practice" (Celce-Murcia and Macintosh, 1979, p. 54) and in this sense "games bring classroom closer to the real world. Each game, by nature, focuses on one or more aspects of English like a grammar point, a vocabulary area, or a communication skill." Games can teach, and there might be no reason why they cannot be included as a part of a lesson.

Significance of the Study

The present study is considered to be significant for some major reasons. It can offer pedagogical applications for teachers, students as well as textbook developers. First of all, the results will help teachers have a better view on using a variety of activities as games. In this way, they would utilize this appropriate technique to improve students' vocabulary.

This study may also reject some teachers' opinions regarding the impracticality of the application of innovative techniques in Saudi Arabia schools. Games help the teachers create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. Secondly, language games have many benefits for students as well. The application of language games in classrooms brings about a sound competition among the students. In a similar way, it can reduce inhibition among shy and weak students calling them to participate in the games.

Many researchers are interested in using games for teaching vocabulary. Therefore, many studies were conducted on using entertainment activities for teaching English vocabulary. However, to the researchers' best knowledge; few studies were conducted on using word games in teaching English vocabulary in Jordan.

Finally, textbook developers will also take substantial benefits from this study. They can select integrate various types of games for different skills and elements of language in the syllabus of the course books.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of using word games primary stage students' achievement in English language vocabulary in Amman in Jordan.

Questions of the Study

1. Are there any statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) in the primary stage students' achievement in English Language vocabulary due to the teaching strategy they are exposed to (using word games and traditional way)?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) in the primary stage students' achievement in English Language vocabulary due to the gender?

Review of Related Literature

Previous Studies

Few studies have actually measured the impact of games on student learning, but one large study by Hake (1998) examined student performance with interactive engagement and traditional lecture methods in introductory physics courses.

He compared 48 classes teaching introductory physics using interactive engagement with 14 classes using traditional lecture methods. Courses classified as having interactive engagement formats contained hands-on activities with discussions involving peers and teachers. Traditional courses had a passive lecture format. In a pre- and posttest comparison of conceptual knowledge, considerably larger gains in conceptual knowledge were reported for the interactive courses, regardless of whether the course was at high school, college, or university level.

Furthermore, in some of the interactive engagement format classes students demonstrated more advanced problem solving. Although causality cannot be completely isolated in this nonequivalent groups design, the large number of students examined, over 6,500, and the consistency of the positive effect of engagement, present a persuasive argument that resonates with the theoretical rationale for using activities in the classroom.

In addition to memory and performance benefits, games and interactive learning methods have important social benefits for students. These activities allow students to practice using the vocabulary of the discipline, which social constructivists purport to be central to learning (Kelly & Green, 1998; Vygotsky, 1962). Feedback from other students can show that participating with the material in the field is acceptable, and also provides positive reinforcement for working with others to accomplish the goal of the activity. Also, stronger students model the ways that they work with the material for students with less developed study habits. The in-class activities can persuade students to rely on each other more as they study outside of class.

Such a context for learning supports the development of social competence (Huyen & Nga, 2003; Nemerow, 1996; Schwartzman, 1997). Games provide structure for interactions, reward students for collaborating and problem solving (Schwartzman, 1997), and promote cooperative learning, "individual accountability, positive interdependence, and the need for group processing and feedback," (Millis & Cottell, 1998, p.149). Whereas students' self-chosen social groups are often homogenous, with members of similar backgrounds and interests, the classroom can provide an opportunity to practice working and learning in heterogeneous teams. In addition to promoting diverse interactions among students, games provide a way to reach and engage students who may have a variety of learning styles. Individual investigations of learning styles support this perception (Franklin, Peat, & Lewis, 2003).

The memory, performance and social benefits of interactive learning techniques contribute to a fourth rationale for including games and simulations in the classroom—improved transfer of learning. Instructors assume that students will use what they learn in other contexts, but this assumption may be false (see Barnett & Ceci, 2002). Students need to have learned the material and be supported in the social norms of applying it, but for students to transfer what they learn, they also need to practice the skill of abstracting what they know and applying it (Alexander & Murphy, 1999). Students often have particular difficulty in far transfer tasks, where they have to use information in a context very different from the learning environment.

Games promote transfer because they require student participation and active involvement with the material within a rich context (Cruickshank & Telfer, 2001).

Creating opportunities for students to practice applying the material, such as in a game or simulation, can bridge the distance between learning concepts presented in a classroom and using that information to solve a problem met outside of the school.

Rationales, which support the use of games and other active learning techniques in the classroom, have a long history (see Cruikshank & Telfer, 2001 for a review). Despite this, they may be underused in college classrooms where the lecture continues to be the norm (Bok, 2005). Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984) comment, "If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire. They are thus not for use solely on wet days and at the end of term!" (p.1). Acceptance of games as a learning tool, rather than as time filler, is essential if their full potential is to be realized. A survey of current business simulation game users, former users and never users among business faculty across disciplines concludes that the number of never users (52.3%) is higher than that of the current users and former users combined (Faria & Wellington, 2004). This is surprising, given the long history of the use of games as an instructional tool in the discipline of business.

Despite the potential benefits for memory, performance, social competence, and transfer of learning, the use of games and other experience-based activities continues to provoke debate.

Design and Methodology

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of: All first, second and third grade students in Wadi El Sir Directorate of education enrolling in the first semester 2013/2014, they form (13820) males and females.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study comprised of (158) first grade students, (76) students in Al Baraa' school for boys and (82) students in Marj Al Hamam primary school for girls in Amman and was distributed into four sections in each school, which were selected purposefully. Two control groups and two experimental groups. Table (1) shows the distribution of the subjects of the study according to group and place of residence variables.

Table (1): The Sample Distribution

School	Gender	Control group	Experimental group	total
Al Baraa' School for boys	Male	37	39	76
Marj Al Hamam school for girls	Female	40	42	82
Total				158

Design of the Study

The participants of the study were divided into two groups, experimental and control. The participants of the experimental group were taught vocabulary using word games for (8) weeks, While the participants of the control group were taught by the traditional way for the same period. A pre-test was given before the application of the treatment to both groups to make sure they are equivalent and the same test was administered as a post-test after applying the treatment to see whether the using of word games for teaching English vocabulary had any influence on the experimental groups and which strategy have more influence on the subjects than the other.

Instrument of the study

The researcher used two strategies for teaching English vocabulary: A strategy by using word games and the traditional strategy. Then the researcher designed a test based on the instructional material of the first, second and third grade English textbooks and collected the data. Validity and reliability were ensured. Both groups; the experimental group as well the control group, were taught by their teachers. The subjects in both groups took a pre-test to determine their actual level before starting the experiment, and the same test was administered as a post-test at the end of the experiment to assess subjects' achievement. The time interval between the pre-test and the post-test was (8) weeks; a period long enough to minimize the effect of the pre-test on the results and conclusions of the experiment.

Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the test reliability, the researcher followed test/retest technique. The researcher applied it to a pilot sample of (20) student who were excluded from the study with a two-week period between the test and the re-test. The reliability of the test was calculated using correlation coefficient and found to be 0.89. This is appropriate for conducting such a study.

Validity of the Instrument

The researchers validated the instrument by submitting it to a jury of two EFL professors teaching at Princess Alia University college, three supervisors of English language working at Wadi Al Sir Directorate of Education, and two teachers of English. They asked the referees write their comments if there are any.

Instructional Material

The instructional material was the first, second and third grade English textbook which includes more than 30 new words in each textbook, but the researcher will cover at least 15 words for each class during the application period.

Procedures of the Study

The researcher did the following:

-Selected the schools.

-designed the test.

-Ensured the validity and reliability of the instrument of the study.

-The researcher conducted the study with the help of the English language teachers in Marj Al Hamam primary school for girls and Al Barra' school for boys.

-Applied the instrument of the study.

- Used SPSS to analyze the collected data.

Statistical Analyses

To answer the study questions, descriptive methods (means and standard deviation) were used for pre and post tests for English language vocabulary test for both the experimental and control groups.

In addition to a Two-Way ANOVAs the statistics used T- test to show equivalence, Two- Way ANOVAs to answer the research questions.

Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of using word games on primary stage students' achievement in English vocabulary in Al Baraa' school for boys and Marj Al Hamam School for girls in Amman. Two control groups and two experimental groups.

The researcher followed the equivalent pre /post test two group designs. Therefore, the means, standard deviations and Two-Way ANOVA analysis of variance were used to analyze data. The results will be displayed based on the questions of the research.

To determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the male and the female groups, a t-test for independent samples was conducted. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of the Achievement of Male and Female Groups on the Pretest

GROUP	SEX	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	Male	68.80	12.307	39
	Female	69.89	10.590	42
	Total	69.36	11.401	81
Control	Male	67.48	10.317	37
	Female	69.60	10.554	40
	Total	68.57	10.434	77
Total	Male	68.15	11.332	76
	Female	69.75	10.515	82
	Total	68.98	10.916	158

Table 2indicates that the difference between males and females is not statistically significant at α=0.05. Thus, since the difference was not significant, the two groups were assumed equivalent and the sample was divided into two groups, an experimental and a control group. The experimental group which was taught vocabulary using games consisted of (39) male students and (42) female students while the control group consisted of (37) male students and (40) female students.

To determine if the two groups are equivalent in their English vocabulary, a pretest was conducted and Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3: T-Test Results of the Experimental and the Control Groups on the Pretest

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GROUP	28.893	1	28.893	.240	.625
SEX	115.300	1	115.300	.958	.329
GROUP * SEX	11.684	1	11.684	.097	.756
Error	20936.903	174	120.327		
Corrected Total	21089.910	177			

Table 3 shows that the difference between the achievement of the two groups on the pretest is not statistically significant at α=0.05. Since there is no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the pretest, the groups were assumed equivalent.

At the end of the experiment, a t-test for independent samples was conducted to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between the males and the females on the posttest, which may be attributed to gender. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviations of the Achievement of Male and Female Groups on the Posttest

GROUP	SEX	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	Male	81.82	8.678	39
	Female	82.34	8.532	42
	Total	82.09	8.559	81
Control	Male	76.64	9.675	37
	Female	77.42	10.922	40
	Total	77.05	10.286	77
Total	Male	79.29	9.488	76
	Female	79.93	10.029	82
	Total	79.62	9.749	158

The results show that the treatment had the same effect on male and female students and the difference between their achievements was not statistically significant.

Table 4 shows that there is a statistically significant difference at α=0.05 between the achievement of the experimental group and that of the control group on the posttest in favor of the experimental group. This difference indicates that using word games for teaching English vocabulary for primary stage students may have had a positive effect on students' achievement English language. The mean score for the experimental group on the posttest was 82.09 while that of the control group was 77.05.

The researcher also conducted a two-way analysis of variance to analyze the posttest achievement scores of the two groups. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5: Summary of the Two-way Analysis of Variance of the Achievement of the control and the Experimental Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GROUP	1131.545	1	1131.545	12.562	.001
SEX	18.817	1	18.817	.209	.648
GROUP * SEX	.734	1	.734	.008	.928
Error	15673.719	174	90.079		
Corrected Total	16823.781	177			

Table 5 shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group on the posttest, was significantly better than that of the control group. However, the information indicates that there was no significant difference attributed to the interaction between the treatment and gender.

To sum up, the researcher believes that the difference in the achievement of the primary stage students was attributed to the using of word games for teaching English vocabulary. The experimental group subjects managed to significantly improve English vocabulary they already have in a period of 8 weeks. The improvement achieved by the control group subjects, however, was not statistically significant. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, the researcher reached the conclusion that the improvement achieved by the experimental group may have been attributed to the way he rendered instruction; using word games.

As a result of this experience, the researcher concluded that students were more engaged in learning when they were given a chance to use games to learn new vocabulary.

Furthermore, using games is a powerful tool with which students can learn English vocabulary with entertainment.

Conclusion

Introducing English to children at an early age gives them the opportunity to widen their horizons and awaken their early enthusiasm and curiosity about languages. This enthusiasm and thirst for learning can be extended with active teaching methods that focus on learning the language through play and discovery. Focus should also be on learning the language for interaction and communication (Lefever, 2007). With all these factors in place, introducing language learning at an early age can result in children's increased self-confidence, joy of learning and active participation in the larger society.

Also, using games can help children learn vocabulary. The use of games may support the learning of receptive vocabulary when the same vocabulary is taught without using games. The activities for very young learners should be within the capabilities of young learners. The activities for very young learners teach vocabulary through play and movement; where as those for young learners involve a greater degree of participatory learning (Slattery, 2005). An overwhelming majority of pupils find games relaxing and motivating. Games should be an integral part of a lesson, providing the possibility of intensive practice while at the same time immensely enjoyable for both students and teachers. Games are useful and more successful than other methods of vocabulary presentation and revision (Uberman, 1998). Games are proven to be useful and effective in our study that they should be used for teaching vocabulary to very young learners. Thus, such a teaching method will help the students actively involved in the process in an enjoyable way.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for research:

If this study is to be replicated to bring further significance, some changes should be made

• Perform the experiment over a longer period of time so that students have adequate time to shake off current habits of traditional strategies for teaching English vocabulary and become more familiar with the using of games.
• Conducting other studies to investigate the effect of using games for teaching English vocabulary on other samples of students.

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