

USING EDUCATIONAL GAMES IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO YOUNG CHILDREN

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Annotation: Over the past two decades, the learning of the English language has gained significant popularity among children. Vocabulary acquisition, being a crucial element of language learning, plays a key role in this process. Teachers employ various strategies to teach vocabulary, particularly to young learners. While traditional methods, such as repetition, are still commonly used, these approaches often lead to a loss of interest among young learners over time. In contrast, game-based methods have proven to sustain students' engagement and interest. This study aimed to enhance vocabulary understanding among young learners through educational games. Conducted at a kindergarten in Chirchik, the research involved 20 non-native young learners, aged 5 to 6 years. Participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of 10 students. The experimental group was taught vocabulary through interactive games, while the control group learned using traditional repetition-based methods. This paper discusses the effectiveness of game-based learning activities and techniques in the vocabulary acquisition process.

Keywords: repetition, vocabulary learning, educational games, beginner learners.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly advancing world, one of the key components of professional education is the knowledge and teaching of foreign languages. The importance of foreign language acquisition, particularly English, has grown significantly within global education systems. This shift has not only impacted higher education but has also extended to preschool education, highlighting the early introduction of foreign languages as a vital educational tool.

Preschool-aged children, compared to adults, have a remarkable ability to acquire foreign languages. This ability makes the early stages of education a critical period for introducing languages that can expand children's worldviews and cognitive abilities. As emphasized by the renowned thinker, Alisher Navoi, in his works, "A people who knows languages knows the world," language acquisition is a means of broadening one's horizons and enriching understanding. This establishes the foundational idea that early foreign language learning provides more than just communication skills it offers a broader worldview and enhanced cognitive flexibility.¹

A significant body of research supports the idea that vocabulary acquisition is central to second language learning. As Harmer (2001) suggests, vocabulary is the vital component of language learning: "If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh" (p. 133). While learning vocabulary is

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali-Shir_Nava%27i?utm

challenging, it is the cornerstone upon which all other language skills are built. Research also indicates that games play a crucial role in vocabulary acquisition, offering a fun and engaging way to learn. Games not only motivate learners but also help contextualize vocabulary, making it meaningful and memorable in real-life scenarios.²

The significance of game-based learning, especially in the context of vocabulary acquisition, creates a niche in current educational methodologies. By reviewing various studies, it becomes evident that the use of games is an effective pedagogical tool in language acquisition, particularly in the early stages. However, the choice of game must align with the proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds of the students, ensuring that the game is both educational and engaging. Moreover, there is a need for careful selection of games that can benefit learners of varying language abilities, especially in preschool education. Games are not just time fillers but integral tools for learning.

This research will contribute to the ongoing discussion about the effectiveness of game-based strategies in early childhood foreign language education.

Literature Review

Vocabulary instruction plays a pivotal role in the field of English language teaching (ELT), as it significantly contributes to the development of other essential language skills such as reading, speaking, and writing. As such, vocabulary teaching occupies a central position in foreign language classrooms. However, research and pedagogical best practices suggest that vocabulary should not be taught in isolation from other language skills. Instead, vocabulary instruction should be both meaningful and engaging, allowing learners to acquire new words in authentic and context-rich environments. In response to the unique needs and preferences of younger students, the concept of "edutainment" has gained prominence. Edutainment, a blend of "education" and "entertainment," refers to a pedagogical approach that integrates enjoyable and educational experiences. This approach is particularly effective in young learner classrooms, where the use of games has become a popular and beneficial method for vocabulary instruction. Games not only make learning more enjoyable but also encourage peer interaction, sustain learners' attention, and foster a dynamic classroom atmosphere.³

According to the Alaa Mamoun Saleh research games increase the student's motivation and enable them to be more engaged while learning. Applying this gamification technique can create the desire for the students to be more creative and actively construct language for themselves, as they become more motivated in using new vocabulary.⁴

Alternatively, DeHaan (as cited in Vahdat & Rasti- Behbahani, 2013, p.63) conducted a study to find the effect of video games in improving listening and reading skills on Japanese students. Results of his study reveal that video games can enhance learner's language acquisition. It was also reported that playing video games increases learners' ability in listening

² Jeremy Harmer in his book *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (1991, p. 133)

³ Lolaxon Abdulolova Ahadjon kizi ,D. Kh. Iskandarova (2025) THE USAGE OF GAMES TO TEACH ENGLISH EFFECTIVELY FOR YOUNG LEARNERS International journal of artificial intelligence

⁴https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359669276_The_Effect_of_Using_Educational_Games_as_a_Tool_in_Teaching_English_Vocabulary_to_Arab_Young_Children_A_Quasi-Experimental_Study_in_a_Kindergarten_School_in_Saudi_Arabia

and reading comprehension. Finally, DeHaan found that a video game's repetition has a positive effect on language learning.⁵

According to many studies conducted to investigate the effects of games in language learning, it is seen that these entire studies highlight that game-based learning method can bring competition, motivation and relaxed or stress-free atmosphere in language learning environment, so students can learn and retain target vocabulary more quickly. Game based learning can make learners become the center of learning, make the learning process easier, more interesting and effective.

Methodology

A quasi-experimental design, in terms of pre-test, post-test has been employed to accomplish the studies goal, which is to investigate the effect of using games with young Uzbek learners in a kindergarten in Chirchiq for teaching English vocabulary.

Participants

Twenty uzbek students who are learning English as a foreign language at a kindergarten were selected for this study. They were selected purposefully regarding the aim of the study. This means that a convenience sampling technique was used. The experimental and control group comprised of ten students each. The participants were between 5 and 6 years old, and all of them were beginner learners. The experiment was lasted a month. The experimental group was taught using games in which the children were involved. This is a communicative approach. On the other hand, the control group was taught using a more "traditional" method by repetition.

Instrument

This study used two strategies for teaching English vocabulary: communicative and traditional approach. This research depended on two tests: pre and posttests. All the children took part in the two tests (pre-test, posttest) in which 10 pictures of the vocabularies which the intervention covered were introduced to them one by one. Then the researcher asked the children about the pictures. Each correct vocabulary was given one mark. The researcher chose this test to make sure that there were not any distractors and other factors that may affect the reliability of the results. The validity of the tests was ensured.

Procedure

Firstly, the children in both groups took a pre-test to determine their actual level before setting up the intervention.

Secondly, the English teacher taught both groups 10 new vocabularies for 2 weeks, which was a limited period due to the limited time of the researcher. Over the 2 weeks, all the participants in both groups had four classes for 30 minutes each. While, in the control group, the lessons were given traditionally, mainly using the textbook and pictures; in the experimental group, the teacher made full use of various games. The teacher used different types of games: ball game, musical chair, dice roll, word fishing, reveal shopping, true or false. The experimental group students were very positive about using games in their classroom. For all these types of games, the teacher explained the tasks and the roles of students clearly at the beginning of each game.

⁵ DeHaan (as cited in Vahdat & Rasti- Behbahani, 2013, p.63)

Finally, to identify the effect of this intervention over a long time, a posttest was given to determine the effect of games on the results and conclusion of this intervention. The investigator followed the same pattern of pictures as in the previous tests. All the tests' marks of all the children were compared, and the results were analyzed.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, all the tests result of each group were scored initially. The correct answers were given one mark, and false answers were graded as zero. Children could score 10 points by answering all the pictures correctly, and zero by responding to them wrongly. The scores were analyzed quantitatively.

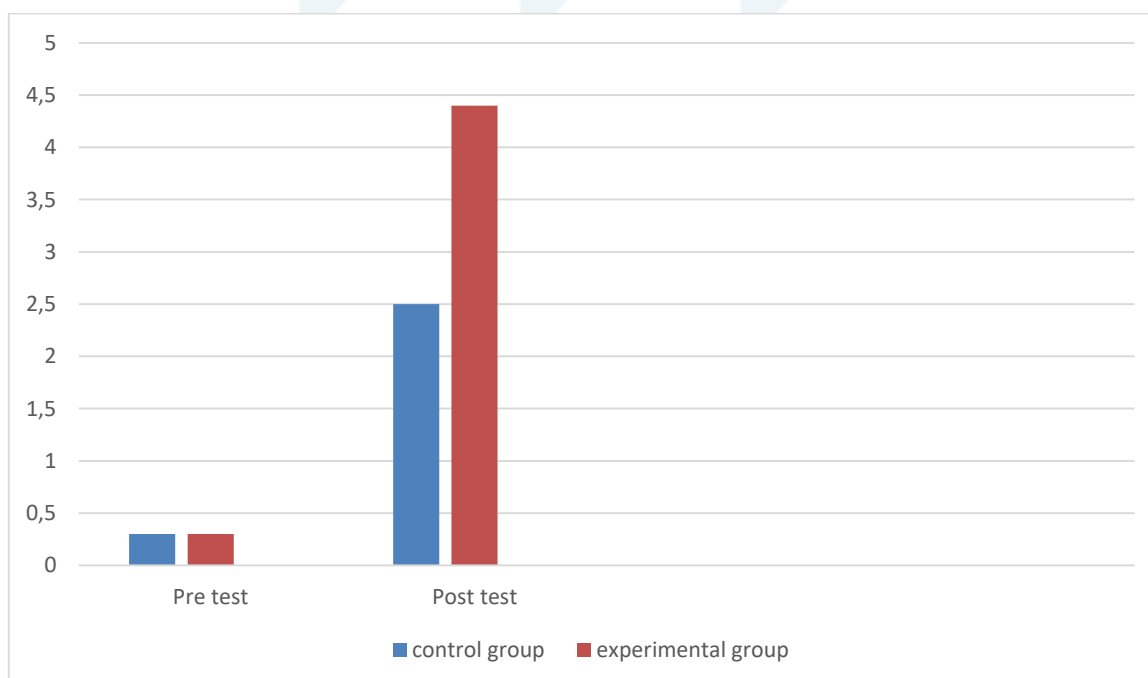
This section has discussed the methodology used, and the next part will address the principal findings of the current investigation.

Results

In this study, the instrument used to gather information was in the form of two tests: pre, posttests. The data were collected and analyzed to see whether the games method has a positive effect on the acquisition of new vocabularies. The children's scores were analyzed. In the following table students score clearly showed the results obtained from the pretest showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups (control and experimental) supporting the fact that they were in a similar level. however, in the post test their score completely different.

Information about test result

Nº	Groups	Pretest score	Posttest score
1	Experimental	0,2	2,5
2	Control	0,2	4,5



This section has analyzed the scores of the participants in the three tests and has argued that a positive effect on the control group was present. The next part of this paper will discuss the findings and relate them to the literature review.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of the communicative method using games for the vocabulary achievement of young learners in a kindergarten. The findings revealed that using educational games to teach vocabulary had many positive effects on the participants, as it has been found that games can entertain, teach, motivate, and enhance young learners' fluency. The results showed that the experimental groups had higher pretest marks. Nguyen and Nga (2003)⁶ argued that games help students to remember new words quickly. Secondly, students in experimental groups had more fun. They interacted, cooperated, and were encouraged to be the winners. The post-test scores showed that applying games were beneficial in the foreign language classroom. With attention to the results of the post-test, a positive effect emerged in both groups. This supported the long-term effect of games on remembering the new vocabulary due to the active way they received the new vocabulary. On the other hand, the results of the control group were surprising to the researcher. The main reason for the long-term effect of the traditional way of learning vocabulary, which was by their mothers helping them to memorize the new vocabulary, is to pass the assessment in the school, and this also showed positive results. Add to that, their teacher applied more revisions before the final exam.

Conclusion

To conclude, this research has investigated the effect of using educational games in the English language classroom as a tool to teach young learners new vocabulary. The findings have shown that games can be the media for teaching English vocabulary to young learners. There was a positive effect on the achievement of the experimental group. The participants were very pleased with this intervention, as many of them reported positive comments. They thoroughly enjoyed their classes. Also, the study revealed that applying gamification as a learning technique with young learners, increased learner engagement, improved knowledge absorption and retention, and gave learners the opportunity to see real word application. Although, there was a positive effect, the short period of the intervention was a limitation. This was because of the limited time the researcher had. Further studies may apply this intervention for a long period of time, and the role of the teacher in such tasks may be explored in the future. Moreover, a survey-based study might be a future tool to generalize these results in different contexts. For the pedagogical implementation, this tool should be used more creatively in classes for young and adult learners. In addition, modern English teachers must obtain up-to-date information about the tools and how to use it appropriately. In order to do that, they can attend workshops and training sessions. Finally, suitable materials should be provided to students in class to facilitate each game.

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