



How can word games help elementary school students to develop vocabulary

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Abstract: This article discusses the mistakes made by teachers in improving the vocabulary of elementary school students who do not have high language skills and how they affect students. In solving such problems, there is another more effective way to improve vocabulary, word games, attempts to discover their useful aspects.

Keywords: vocabulary, word games, memorize, definitions, elementary school students, foreign language, quiz, strategies, spelling.

Introduction

Vocabulary is a main component of literacy and affects the overall understanding of what is being learned. Oftentimes, students are instructed to get a dictionary and look up definitions of words they come across that are unfamiliar to them. When this happens, the word is stored in the short-term memory and typically is not fully understood or applied in other contexts [1]. Flynt and Brozo [2] state that, the more meaningful and authentic the context a teacher uses the greater the impact on students' ownership of the targeted terms. The objective is not for students to know the meaning of the word for a day, or even an hour, but instead to have them engage in the words so that they can apply them to their everyday lives. Lack of vocabulary mastery will make the students feel insecure about learning a foreign language, especially in elementary school. Sometimes, an elementary school student who has just learned vocabulary or only reads text or opens a dictionary will be able to say something [3]. In addition, students with lack of vocabulary also read slowly because they do not understand many words or have to stop and look for them in a dictionary.

Although young learners can receive and learn new information quickly, there are still some problems faced by the teacher while teaching young learners. Young learners still have difficulties in understanding abstract things, because they have limited vocabulary [4]. The teacher teaches language by repeating words and only uses the same strategy all the time during the class [5]. As a result, the students are bored and not interested in following the learning process. Moreover, according to students writing, some of the elementary school students need extensive time to memorize vocabulary that is given by the teacher [6]. This problem probably appears when the students have difficulty concentrating during the learning process and the young learner has characteristics that can receive new information quickly but lacks concentration span and easily gets bored during the learning process. It is crucial to continue to practice using the words in various contexts.



The power of gameplay is amazing. When students enjoy what they are doing and are having fun with the learning, it is much more effective. Read [7] explains that in the recent trend of vocabulary assessment, the assessment not only focuses on vocabulary knowledge (form and meaning) but also the usage. Furthermore, Bachman and Palmer, as excerpted by Read [7], say that even at the elementary level the test should be in context to assess the communicative ability (use), for example, in the “going to the zoo” topic not only test the names of animals but also test some meaningful use of language outside the classroom. People sometimes consider that in order the students to learn well, they need to study seriously. That way of teaching should not always be so serious. The concept of learning should be serious is a misconception. Therefore, games are the activity that provides exciting and fun activity for the students in learning English. Traditional classroom activities mostly emphasize grammar rules (forms). Teachers in these classes imagine that learning grammar is equated with learning the language while students are not pleased with grammar. But in communicative approaches such as games, the emphasis is on the meaning and students feel free to interact. Most of the traditional classroom activities consist of many drills that emphasize accuracy and consume a lot of time but communicative activities develop communication skills that stress fluency. The teacher governing the traditional classroom activities corrects students’ mistakes when they’ve made it but in the communicative approach, it is believed that students should communicate with each other. They claim when students can communicate, their mistakes will be corrected automatically.

Word games are ordinarily used as entertainment, but they can be used for educational purposes too. Children, for example, can have the pleasure of using games, such as word search, hangman, and word puzzles. Naturally, it makes students skilled in spelling. Solving crosswords, which requires patience and familiarity with a larger vocabulary has better brain function later on. Word games are great media for students to have exciting activities with words. They can practice spelling skills and arrange the vocabulary. The games that can be chosen such as Crosswords, Jumble, Word Searches, Word Chain, and so on. Vocabulary instruction cannot be a list of words on Monday with a quiz on Friday. Nor should students be expected to look up definitions in a dictionary to learn the vocabulary. The learning has no purpose for the students, their individual needs are not being met, and there is no opportunity to make connections between the terms and the context it is used. Students need opportunities to use the vocabulary in meaningful, relatable ways. Various instructional strategies provided a framework for my students to build meaning. Providing the different activities allowed the students to explore the word and be able to make meaning with it. Students remember words better if they connect new meanings to the knowledge they already have. To avoid feeling bored of the students, teachers should consider some factors in choosing the appropriate game for their students. The factors are the number of students in the classroom, level of age, level of grade, time duration of the game, and the difficulties of the game. According to Carrier [8], teachers should first consider the level of the game to fit their students’ language level. They should choose the game that fits the purposes of that class or the content. Moreover, teachers should consider students’ characteristics: whether they are old or young, serious-minded or light-hearted, and highly motivated to learn or not. They should also consider when the game should be used.

The game has many advantages for learning. According to Cameron [9], the advantages of games



are as follows:

- It can be used to change the pace of a lesson and to maintain motivation
- It can encourage students to interact and communicate.
- It can act as a testing mechanism, in the sense that it will expose areas of weakness and the need for remedial work.
- It can make students seek to solve problems in which they are intimately involved.
- It can be used to punctuate long formal teaching units and review students' energy before returning to more formal learning.
- It can help students to make and sustain the effort of learning
- Vocabulary games bring real-world context into the classroom and increase the students' use of English in flexible, meaningful, and communicative ways.
- It usually involves friendly competition and they keep students interested in learning the language.

Most importantly, students must be allowed to have multiple exposures to a word in different contexts, as well as be encouraged to actively participate in their word learning. Content vocabulary should be addressed and unfamiliar words should be loosely pre-taught to help ease students into the material. Teachers should also encourage students to read independently to help develop vocabulary through wide reading. Based on the discussion above, research discovered that the Word Games can be used to increase the vocabulary mastery of the students. Thus, the students have enthusiasm for the teaching and learning process. Then, the students have better self-confidence than before. This is because games make them relax in the learning process.

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