

Using Games to Teach Young Learners Vocabulary

Mar'atus Sholikhah, Desi Nopianti

Subang University-English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Subang University¹

Subang University-English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Subang University²

maratusholikhah630@gmail.com

Abstrak

Teaching English to young learners has become a phenomenon in Saudi Arabia over the last few decades. In kindergarten and elementary schools, English is the primary subject. Saudi children, like any other, readily accept new foreign languages, but they become quickly bored if their teachers use outdated methods and techniques. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that games are effective tools for explaining vocabularies and making it easier to remember their meanings. This paper is a review of the literature on using games to teach English vocabulary to young learners. The article then discusses the significance of using games in vocabulary instruction and how they can be beneficial. Following that, it investigates the practical implications of using games to teach vocabulary, which includes the implementation of vocabulary games and some examples of games that could be used to teach children vocabulary. Finally, it investigates the difficulties that teachers face when teaching vocabulary to young learners through games.

Keywords: *young learners, games, vocabulary, practical challenges, practical implications*

Abstract

Pengajaran bahasa Inggris kepada pelajar muda telah menjadi fenomena di Arab Saudi selama beberapa dekade terakhir. Di taman kanak-kanak dan sekolah dasar, bahasa Inggris adalah mata pelajaran utama. Anak-anak Saudi, seperti anak lainnya, siap menerima bahasa asing baru, tetapi mereka menjadi cepat bosan jika guru mereka menggunakan metode dan teknik yang ketinggalan zaman. Tujuan dari makalah ini adalah untuk menunjukkan bahwa permainan adalah alat yang efektif untuk menjelaskan kosakata dan membuatnya lebih mudah untuk mengingat artinya. Makalah ini adalah tinjauan literatur tentang penggunaan game untuk mengajarkan kosakata bahasa Inggris kepada pelajar muda. Artikel ini kemudian membahas pentingnya menggunakan permainan dalam pengajaran kosakata dan bagaimana mereka dapat bermanfaat. Setelah itu, menyelidiki implikasi praktis dari menggunakan permainan untuk mengajar kosa kata, yang mencakup implementasi permainan kosakata dan beberapa contoh permainan yang dapat digunakan untuk mengajarkan kosakata kepada anak-

anak. Akhirnya, menyelidiki kesulitan yang dihadapi guru ketika mengajar kosa kata untuk pelajar muda melalui permainan.

Kata kunci: *pelajar muda, permainan, kosa kata, tantangan praktis, implikasi praktis*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners has become a phenomenon in Saudi Arabia over the last few decades. In kindergarten and elementary schools, English is the primary subject. Saudi children, like any other, readily accept new foreign languages, but they become quickly bored if their teachers use outdated methods and techniques. Teachers are responsible for devising interesting and appealing methods of teaching and motivating their students. According to Harmer (2008), teachers of young learners should spend a significant amount of time investigating and comprehending how their students operate and think.

Teaching young learners is more difficult than teaching teenagers or adults because young learners become distracted quickly. Children enjoy having fun and playing, so teachers should select appropriate teaching methods that cater to the nature of children. Games are one method that could be used to prevent boredom in the classroom. They play an important role in the teaching of any foreign language. Incorporating games into the classroom will benefit both students and teachers. Furthermore, teachers can achieve all educational outcomes by using games, particularly when teaching vocabulary.

Although language structure is referred to as "the skeleton of the language," it was agreed that vocabulary is "the vital organs and flesh of the language" (Harmer, 1991). Vocabulary is the foundation and most important aspect of learning any language. Teaching vocabulary through games has become critical for English language learners because it maintains enjoyment and interest in learning while encouraging fearless and creative use of the language.

This paper is organized into four sections. The first section is a review of the literature on using games to teach English vocabulary to young learners. The second section discusses the importance of using games in vocabulary instruction and how they can help. The third section looks into the practical implications of using games to teach vocabulary, which includes the implementation of vocabulary games as well as some examples of games that could be used to teach vocabulary to

children. The fourth section looks at the difficulties teachers face when teaching vocabulary to young learners through games.

Personal interest is the primary reason for selecting this topic. My interest in finding fun and interesting ways to teach vocabulary was sparked by having a son, nieces, and nephews in elementary school. Games have proven to be an effective tool for explaining vocabularies and making it easier to remember their meanings.

DISCUSSION

Teaching Young Students Young learners will be defined in the following section, and factors that may influence their maturity will be briefly mentioned. Characteristics of young learners will be discussed, as well as some points to consider when teaching young learners. Following that, the benefits of teaching English to young learners and the reasons for teaching the language at the elementary level will be discussed.

What Exactly Are Young Learners?

Young learners are defined as children aged five or six in their first year of elementary school and up to twelve years old. However, children's ages are not always an indication of their maturity. According to Philips (1993), several factors influence children's maturity. These include their culture, gender, environment (urban or rural), and parents. Their development should also be taken into account. Some children develop quickly, while others may require more time. A good teacher of young learners should be aware of all of their differences because understanding them can assist teachers in deciding which activities to use in their teaching processes. In other words, rather than their physical age, teachers' decisions must be influenced by their knowledge of the children's attitudes, interests, and circumstances.

This essay focuses on children aged five to seven who are considered to be at the beginner level of schooling. Young learners, according to Halliwell (1992), have good meaning interpretation skills without understanding the actual meaning of individual words. They learn indirectly, rather than directly, by using the limited vocabulary they have. Furthermore, their imagination is always ready. They take great pleasure and delight in making their actions and words amusing.

Yetenberg (1990) described young learners as having difficulties distinguishing the real world from an imaginary one, which could make it difficult for their teacher to understand and cope with their reality perception. Young learners prefer to be accompanied by others when playing or working, rather than working alone. They employ their language abilities before they are even aware of them. They also learn through body movement, mimicry, and gestures. Furthermore, because children have a very short attention span, teachers must keep this in mind when designing and selecting activities for their young students. Praise is essential for young learners because it motivates them when their teacher shares their enthusiasm.

Phillips (1993) assumed that if younger children are taught at a young age, they will be holistic learners. They respond to the meaning underlying the language used rather than individual words or sentences. When teaching young students, Philips emphasized the importance of simplifying activities so that students understand what the teacher expects of them. The tasks chosen by teachers must be

entertaining in such a way that young students can easily achieve the objectives set for them. Furthermore, the tasks must be motivating and stimulating so that young learners feel satisfied with their work.

Furthermore, Slattery (2001) identified some characteristics shared by young learners. They are curious, imaginative, and playful students. They mature quickly as individuals and enjoy routines and repetitions. They learn through listening, imitating, watching, and doing. They require a variety of activities due to their short attention span. They also talk about what they did and understand in their mother tongue, which aids their learning.

2.1.2 English Instruction for Young Learners

Children must be exposed to and hear the language when they are young in order to learn it. In general, it is agreed that children learn languages better than adults because they have more time to learn and no worries or responsibilities. They are also better at learning any language when they are exposed to it naturally for an extended period of time.

English is taught to young students at the elementary (primary) level for a variety of reasons. Children must be exposed to the language and culture from an early age, according to Brumfit, Moon, and Tongue (1991), in order to grow up with tolerance and understanding for others.

Cameron (2001) stated that, in addition to knowledge and skills, teachers must keep four things in mind when teaching English to young learners. Teachers must be aware of how their students think and learn. They must also be able to determine what children are interested in and use that information to teach language. Furthermore, teachers should be prepared to teach young students literacy in English and deliver the entire lesson orally. Last but not least, while teaching the language, the teacher should identify problems and difficulties.

According to Brown (2001), in order for their young learners to be successful in learning the language, teachers must consider their characteristics and intellectuality.

2.2 Vocabulary teaching Young learners must pay attention to elements of the English language such as pronunciation, spelling, structure, and vocabulary. Students must know the vocabulary of the language, which is a list of words with their meanings, in order to improve their English skills (Linse, 2005). Children must learn one to two thousand words in order to speak and write in English (Cameron, 2001). This section will discuss briefly how vocabulary is learned, as well as some methods and approaches for teaching it.

2.2.1 How Do You Learn Vocabulary?

David Wilkins, a linguist, stated, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." Labeling is typically used by young learners when they first begin to learn to speak, followed by categorizing skills (Thornbury, 2002). According to Thornbury, young learners develop a network building process in which they construct complex ideas. During this process, they become aware of other words such as synonyms, antonyms, and others.

There are several approaches and methods for teaching English vocabulary to young learners. Using real objects that children can later visualize is a good way for them to learn language vocabulary. They must listen to and repeat their teacher's instruction using the word. Another method is the direct method, in which no translation is used and the use of the mother tongue is prohibited. In the classroom, only complete sentences in the target language are used. Another method is the Total Physical Response (TPR), which is commonly used by teachers because children are hyperactive, physically active, and unable to concentrate for long periods of time.

However, using this method, which includes games and a variety of activities, will allow young learners to quickly learn language vocabularies. Furthermore, teachers of young learners encourage communication by employing the Communicative Language Approach (CLT), which emphasizes language meaning in context.

2.3 Using Games to Teach Vocabulary

Halliwell (1991) argued that because young learners bring creative language skills to the classroom, teachers must provide them with a communicative environment in which they can express themselves. Teachers must also encourage students to actively construct language for themselves because the language used in any activity is unpredictable. That is why games are significant and beneficial. They are not only entertaining, but they also create a desire to communicate and predictability.

Using games to teach vocabulary to young learners necessitates trained teachers who engage children in play while also mastering the linguistic aspect of the language. According to Rixon (1981), understanding games will assist teachers in finding and developing games that will allow their students to learn while playing.

This section will provide a definition of the word game as well as reasons for using games when teaching young learners. The benefits and drawbacks of using games to teach language vocabulary will also be discussed.

2.3.1 What Exactly Is a Game?

According to Jones (1980), one or more players could participate in a game to compete or cooperate according to a set of rules. According to Rogers (1981), gaming is a goal-defined, rule-governed, and competitive activity that has a conclusion and engages students. According to Gibbs (1981), a game is an activity performed by cooperating or competing decision-makers who want to achieve their goals by following a set of rules. Games are closed activities with a beginning and an end, with a winner defining the game's conclusion (Rixon, 1981).

Games necessitate teamwork as well as competition with other teams or players. Young learners must use language and repeat patterns while playing in order to develop and improve their skills. The player could communicate using words, mime, body movements, and gestures, among other things, to ensure fun and unpredictability (Rixon, 1981).

2.3.2 Why Do We Use Games to Teach Young Learners?

Games are used to help young learners learn new languages. They make classes enjoyable and maintain effort and interest. They foster an environment of meaningful communication in which young students communicate before, during, and after the game (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005). This environment aids in the formation of comprehensible input, such as what they understand as they listen and read (Krashen, 1985), as well as comprehensible output, such as writing and speaking (Swain, 1993). Furthermore, games elicit emotions when language instruction becomes serious and dry (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000 and Ersoz, 2000). They help to reduce their nervousness and shyness, especially if the game is played in small groups (Richard-Amato, 1988). (Uberman, 1998). In addition, games could incorporate all four language skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading (Lee, 1995).

When playing games, students take an active role, promoting student-centered activities. When played in small groups, students can practice politely disagreeing, asking for help, and cooperating with others (Jacobs & Kline Liu, 1996). They promote cooperation, teamwork, competition, and taking turns (Ersoz, 2000 and Orlick, 2006). Gardner (1999) stated that games include a variety of intelligences such as visual intelligence when drawing, interpersonal intelligence when playing with others, and kinesthetic intelligence when providing hands-on elements such as cards.

3. The value of games in teaching vocabulary to young students

According to Lewis (1999), games are popular among children because they enjoy playing. Young learners could interact, discover, and experiment with their surroundings through games. The use of games not only increases students' motivation, but also serves as an incentive and stimulus to use the language.

According to Harmer (2008), in order to speak English fluently, young learners must be able to recognize language features and process information quickly. As a result, young learners must practice using a variety of appropriate techniques to aid their information processing and simultaneous language operations.

According to Allen (1983), games are important in vocabulary teaching because they highlight the necessary and important words to achieve the game's objectives. Huyen Ang Nga (2003) and Uberman (1998) agreed that games create a fun and relaxed environment in which young learners can learn quickly and retain words more effectively. Vernon (2009) argued that games are an effective tool for teaching young learners vocabulary. Children participate and pay more attention because they enjoy themselves and the classroom environment, and they feel and perform better during and after the game. Repetition will be less boring and more enjoyable for children, thereby consolidating their learning of new words.

Furthermore, incorporating physical movement into games will keep young learners alert and stimulated. Young learners often become impatient and bored if they attend lessons for an extended period of time, so incorporating physical movements every now and then will ensure their participation. According to Vernon (2009), games that engage learners in healthy competition can help them learn more without forcing their participation. Thus, selecting the appropriate game can promote healthy competition in the classroom.

4. Practical Implications of Using Games to Teach Vocabulary 4.1 Implementations of Using Games to Teach Vocabulary

When a teacher implements games to teach vocabulary to young learners, two steps must be followed: grouping the students and explaining and instructing them on the game. This section will go over those steps briefly.

4.1.1 Student Grouping

Scott and Ytreberg (2004) emphasized the importance of forcing young learners to sit in a group setting because they prefer to be surrounded by their peers. Sitting students together promotes cooperation, but this does not imply that they must work in groups all of the time. According to Phillips (1993), having a group of more than five students will result in counter-productivity and chaos. Teachers could instruct their students to count one through two sequentially, with students with the same number forming a group on the floor. Following that, young students could be asked to choose a name for their group, which would be written on the white board to record their scores. If there are an unequal number of students, for example, five, one group may have three students and the other two. This type of grouping technique will aid in the creation of a cooperative and competitive atmosphere among group members.

4.1.2 Providing Game Explanation and Instruction

In order to achieve the desired outcome and fulfill the goal behind its implementation, it is critical to explain the game to young learners. When implementing games in the classroom, teachers play an important role because they must provide clear explanations and instructions so that students understand how to play and practice the list of vocabularies intended to be learned.

Using games to teach vocabulary to young learners is a waste of class time if the teacher does not explain the game's rules and instructions. There will be no results if the students do not know what to do, and they will become bored quickly.

As previously stated, games are engaging ways to teach young learners vocabulary. They assist students in effectively learning their vocabulary without boredom, and they easily learn the lessons. Hot Potatoes, Memory Challenge, Last One Standing, Pictionary, and Bingo will be discussed in this section due to space constraints.

'Hot Potatoes' is the first game. The class is divided into two groups, A and B, with each team sitting on opposite sides of the classroom. Two chairs will be placed in the center of the classroom so that whoever sits on them faces her/his team and the board is behind them. The teacher then writes a word on the board, which the student in the chair cannot see. After the game begins, each team will have one minute to prepare. Other students are permitted to use verbs in order for their seated teammate to guess the word written on the board. They must not say the exact word that is written on the board.

Another game that could be used to teach young learners vocabulary is 'Memory Challenge.' Students must sit in pairs or small groups. Each group is given three minutes to write down as many

words from their previous lesson, such as animals. The group with the most words remembered wins the game.

The third game is 'Last One Standing,' in which the children are given a topic, such as fruit. They must form a circle and wait for the teacher to count to three before announcing the topic. Following that, the first student in the circle must give a word related to the topic, and so on. Students who are unable to say a new word or repeat the words of the previous student must take a seat. The winner will be the last student standing.

The fourth example of a game that could be used to teach vocabulary to young learners is 'Pictionary.' The class must be divided into two groups. Each group will take a seat on the opposite side of the classroom. One student from each team will be called to the board, where the teacher will call out a word or phrase for the student to draw as a clue on the board. The team that correctly guesses the word wins. The final game to be discussed is 'Bingo.' In this game, the teacher writes ten words on the board and each student chooses five of them to write down. Following that, the teacher chooses one word at random and gives the students its definition or synonym without saying it. If a student correctly guesses the word, he or she should shout BINGO! and win the round.

5. The Practical Difficulties of Using Games to Teach Vocabulary to Young Learners

Although games have proven to be an effective method for teaching vocabulary to young learners, they do pose some challenges for both the teacher and the students. The first difficulty is the noisy and disorganized classroom. When children are excited, they tend to move and talk excessively, making it difficult to keep them under control. Brown (2001) stated that in order to create a good learning environment, the teacher must understand the characteristics of the students.

Teachers of young learners must select a variety of creative games to keep young learners' attention instead of being distracted by something else. According to Harmer (2001), children are not expected to sit or do the same activity for an extended period of time because they lose interest after a few minutes. Furthermore, as previously stated, young learners have a short attention span, so activities must be as engaging as possible, as they lose interest after ten minutes. When selecting or designing games to teach vocabulary to young learners, creativity is essential.

Another issue that teachers may face is that students may want to communicate with each other and their teachers in their mother tongue during class and games. Even if a student asks a question in their native language, teachers must respond in English. Teachers, in my opinion, should occasionally use young learners' native language to encourage students to speak and participate in the lesson.

Teachers may have some time after the game to drill the vocabulary they assigned to their students. Students may not have the opportunity to repeat and practice saying the words. As a result, students may make incorrect assumptions about the images shown by their teachers.

The type of game, number of vocabulary words, time, effort, and use of the students' native language should all be balanced. Experienced teachers will have no trouble balancing all of these challenges while teaching vocabulary to their young students through games.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Teachers must be patient when teaching young learners vocabulary through games in order for students to enjoy learning. Games can assist young learners in effectively learning their vocabulary. As previously stated, there are several games that can be used to teach vocabulary, including Hot Potatoes, Memory Challenge, Last One Standing, Pictionary, and Bingo. When designing or selecting a game, the teacher should consider time and materials. Although there are advantages and disadvantages to using games to teach vocabulary, using them will allow young learners to learn the lesson while having fun and remembering all of the vocabulary easily.

Although games are popular among young learners, they should not be used excessively. They should be chosen in accordance with the level, interest, and context of the students. It must also be concerned with the presented topic and vocabulary. Any game can be effective if it is used appropriately for the topic and is overseen by a wise and skilled teacher.

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