The Role of Using Games in Teaching Vocabulary
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Overview:

The knowledge of vocabulary plays a very important role in foreign language communication as lack of vocabulary, significantly, affects the language skills. This vividly indicates the importance of vocabulary in foreign language communication. In this respect, this paper attempted to investigate the effectiveness of using games for developing and teaching vocabulary. It also aims to attract the teachers` attention towards the importance of using games which facilitate teaching and learning vocabulary of English. Therefore, this paper is concerned with some types of games that can be used in teaching vocabulary for Libyan learners of English at primary schools.

Introduction:

Having a large vocabulary is a great asset in all areas of communication. It helps students throughout their educational career and beyond as professionals. Lack of vocabulary, on the contrary, significantly affects all the language skills, as Watcyn (2001) very aptly states that "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be convoyed" (p:111).Thornbury (2007) for example, lists several techniques of teaching vocabulary in ELT classrooms such as translation, definitions, real things, situations and gestures. However, there is still a number of challenges that face EFL teachers while attempting to teach vocabulary such as: large numbers of students, insufficient time, small size of the class and unavailable of teaching aids, which may

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be helpful. Moreover, vocabulary is not an easy aspect to teach; particularly for young learners who are learning words of a foreign language is not always easy; thereby, not fun(P:77).However, play and fun forms are a very crucial aspect of learning among the young learners. The research of Uberman (1998:12) has shown that "children learn and develop faster when they are playing. Therefore, it can be assumed that when teachers find ways to fully engage students in the learning process, vocabulary learning will become more enjoyable". Such views brief the importance of vocabulary in foreign language communication and the need of an effective approach to teach and develop this is a very crucial aspect of foreign language learning.

The Concept of Vocabulary:

Defining Vocabulary:

Vocabulary is generally defined as the knowledge of words and word meaning. "More specifically, we use the word vocabulary to refer to the kind of words that students must know to read increasingly demanding text comprehension" (Kamil and Hiebert, 2005: 4). According to Cameron (2012:18) in the language teaching terms, the development of words, their meanings and links between them will be considered under the term vocabulary. The term vocabulary is also used to refer to the teaching and developing of students' understanding of word meanings. (Neuman and Dwyer, 2011:33) argue that "The term vocabulary can be defined as the words we must know to communicate effectively, words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)". According to Stahl (2005:13) "Vocabulary knowledge is the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world". In line with this view,

Laufer (1997:33) categorizes word knowledge as syntactic pattern of the word in a phrase or a sentence, meaning, common collocations, and the lexical relations of the word with other words, such as synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, and finally common collocations. Many researchers have also classified vocabulary knowledge in different ways such as: the word form, the word meaning and the word structure. To sum up, one can say that vocabulary knowledge is a complex system which consists of several types of vocabulary knowledge besides meaning and form.

The Importance of Teaching Vocabulary:

Vocabulary has moved to be a central stage in foreign language teaching and learning in recent years, backed by substantial and increasing research by scholars like Carter and McCarthy (1988); Nia (2010); Schmitt (2004); Decarrico, Jeanette (2001); Cameron (2012). The goal of teaching vocabulary is to help students learn the meaning of many words so they can communicate effectively and achieve academic objectives, especially when insufficient vocabulary or vocabulary difficulties will result in communicational barriers or failures. That is "Without the mediation of vocabulary, no amount of grammatical or other types of linguistic knowledge can be employed in second language communication or discourse" Xia, j (2010:1). Lewis (1992:8) also believes that vocabulary acquisition is the main task of second language acquisition and the language skills as listening, speaking, writing and reading and translating all cannot go without vocabulary. Han(1977), Risky(1993) and Huland (1983:50) state that it is advised that teachers must make sure that students have understood the new words, which will be recalled better if introduced in a "Memorable way".

Teachers, then must ensure that their students learn vocabulary effectively.

 Kopecek (2010:11) also argues that learning vocabulary (or lexis in other words) is essential. Learners start to explore the beauty of the foreign language through a great variety of new words. As they start to be experienced learners, they are able to recognize new words and to compare them with their native language, identify the similarities and differences. Lord (1993:8) believes that "Vocabulary is by far the most sizable and unmanageable component in the learning of any language, whether for a foreign or one's mother tongue because of thousands of different meanings".

Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary:

Many researchers have been done on presenting vocabulary effectively in foreign language pedagogy. Gaims and Redman (1986:46) for example, have suggested the following types of vocabulary presentation techniques:

1-Visual techniques: Visual techniques lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of vocabulary-nouns and they are also helpful in conveying meaning of verbs and adjectives. They help students associate presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into their system of language values.

2-Verbal explanation: This pertains to the use of illustrative situations, synonymy, opposites, and scales.

3-Use of dictionaries: Students can make use of a variety of dictionaries-bilingual, monolingual, pictorial, thesauri, and the like.

The ways of Presenting Vocabulary:

In the way of presenting vocabulary Doff (1988) "Another way to show what words mean by giving example and using the word in in a context". Kopecek (2010:20) states that there are several ways to

know the meaning of an English word through different aids such as: **1-**Objects that can be easily brought to class (**umbrella, scissors, tools, buttons** of many **colors** and **sizes**, etc.); **2-**Drawings by the teacher and drawings by the students; **3-**Demonstrations to show actions. There are also varieties of activities for classroom to help students learn language effectively such as: **games**, **music**, **dramatic stories** and **amusing anecdotes** etc. **Role-play** is one of them. Xia. J (2010:15). Traditionally, the presentation of new language items would swiftly be followed by the practice of these items. This practice would typically take the form of some kind of oral repetition, as drills. However, Dolati and Mikaili (2011:20) argued that vocabulary instruction should include. teacher-student activities and interactive activities that target new words.

Coyne McMoach and Kapp (2007). state that translation is another way of presenting words. Crookall (1990:8) argues that teaching vocabulary through translation and word lists, especially with mother-tongue equivalent are very useful because learners might not be able to use the new words in any communicative way without further assistance.

Teaching Vocabulary by Using Games:

The definition of games:

Kopecek (2010:21) defined games as "the different activities which evoke a pleasant and enchanting atmosphere for participants". However, for Baudains (1990) "Games are activities students do for their own sake, for the immediate fun, curiosity or competitive ambition aroused by the game" (P:3). According to Salen and Zimmerman (cited in McCarty et al). (2012:5) games are "a system in which players engage in artificial conflict, defined by rules, which results in a quantifiable outcome". Salopeck (1999) believes that "a

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game is a structural activity with learning at the end" (P:23). However, Hornby (1995:11) argues that a game is an activity that you do to have some fun. While, Gredler (1994:4) believes that any contest among adversaries (players) operating under constraints (rules) for an objective (winning) is a game. Acknowledging the benefits of games in teaching, Nicolson and Williams (1975:1) believe that the game is a form of teaching which may be used in circumstances where ordinary approaches are not well tolerated I.e. when attention is hard to get and harder to keep. Moon (2005:88-89) also describes language-learning games as activities having a clear language aim, a purpose of playing and involving opportunities to improve target language. Righty and Ryan, (2007) believe that effective games provide the following results:

1-Clear and unobtrusive, and **2-**Immediately responsive to the player's actions (P:8).

According to Jones and Issroff (2005:4) the feedback also helps reinforce motivation. Students are able to adapt to the feedback, so the game continues to adapt the student. In this respect, Flader and Blaski (2005:8) have listed three key features of motivating games which are: **Interactivity**, **agency**, and **engagement**. Schmitt and McCarthy (2009:4) believe that games support many of the components such as **clear goals**, **direct** and **immediate feedback**, **balance** between **ability level** and **challenge**, and **sense** of **control**. These components can increase students' engagement which is strongly associated with students' achievement.

 "Motivation is another benefit of games which is driven from our belief about how good we will be and our interest in and the value of the goal. That is why players are more motivated when they feel a personal attachment to the goal".

(Schmitt McCarthy 2009:6) states that some games are based on external motivation, where students receive particular rewards for playing the games to entice them to continue practicing learning.

However, according to Salopeck and Barab (1999:135) games are played most likely for:

. Entertainment.

. Effective language learning.

. Possibility to play them in any part of language lesson.

. Learner` active participation.

. High level of motivation.

Games in English Language Teaching:

Games are frequently cited as important mechanisms for language teaching mainly English because they can accommodate a wide variety of learning styles within a complex decision making context (Squire, 2006:5). Games foster collaboration, problem-solving, and procedural thinking which are important skills. Games require the kind of thinking that we need in 21 the st century because they use actual learning activities as the basis for assessment. An attractive element of gaming experience as a learning tool is that it provides opportunities for continuing practice because negative consequences are not typically associated with failure. Rather, failure serves an integral part of the learning experience. Therefore, it is argued that teachers facilitate the transfer of skills by leading pre-and post-game discussions which connect the game with other things students are learning in the class (Ash, 2011:4). In this regard, further support comes from Zdybiewska (1994:6) who believes that games could be a good way of practicing language as they provide a model of what learners will use the language in real life in the future. According to Richards (1969:24) pleasure for its own sake, is an important part of

language learning, a fact which is often over-looked by the teacher in his quest for teaching points, or by the course designer focusing on presentation or repetition. Thus, games can really be a part of effective English language teaching due to the various benefits embedded in their use.

To sum up in Kopecek (2010:21) words, "teachers should use games because young learners love them, in many cases, they fairly call for them. They understand games as a natural part of their lives, something they need to surround them to evoke enjoyable and friendly environment".

Advantages and disadvantages of using games for teaching vocabulary:

Like any activity, games have advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages of using games is that they motivate students to learn vocabulary items which are related to the games being acted. This is because they are fun and make students want to experience, discover and interact with their environment. Nguyen and Khuat (2003:11) believe that vocabulary games enable learners to use English in a meaningful communication context. Acknowledging such benefits, Lewis and Bedson (1990:8) argue that games can be a type of media that will provide many advantages to the teacher and the students as well.

In this respect, Dolati and Mikaili (2011:7) have also agreed that games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. **First**, games bring in relaxation and fun for young learners, helping 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 actively participate 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.

On the other hand, games also have many disadvantages, for example, Pathan, M and Aldersi, Z (2014) argue that choosing or designing the right game for the lesson you want to teach can be more time-consuming than planning a traditional lesson. They also believe that the game may create anxious feeling if it is ended before finishing the task because the time runs out so fast, so teachers must put a time limit for each game to solve such problem.

How and when to choose games for ELT classroom:

According to Dolati and Mikaili (2011:7) in order to achieve the best when using vocabulary games, it is essential that suitable games must be chosen. Whenever, a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account. Allen and Valetter (1977:42) also argue that games should be carefully selected so that the activity contributes to furthering the linguistic aims at the lesson. Using games in a meaningful way within lessons depends for more on the effective use of exciting teaching skills than it does on the development of any new game related to the skills. According to Thiagi (1998:13) well-constructed games share the following characteristics:

1-Conflict: players must have a goal to achieve, as well as obstacles that up.

2-Control: the games must have a clear set of rules that indicate how to play the game (make moves, taking turns, etc.)

3-Closure: it must be clear how and under what conditions the game ends (e.g.,when a certain point is achieved, after a specific time limit, when players are eliminated, etc.)

4-Contrivance: those things that allow learners to say, after all, it's a game!

5-Competency: refers to the specific skill or knowledge areas that the game is designed to improve.

According to Mohini (2005:58) when concluding the game, the teacher should consider the following:

. Telling about task or activity as a part of a game.

. Giving instruction (in either target or mother tongue).

. Appointing leaders (in case of group work).

. Providing materials (if any).

. Assigning roles (if any).

. Setting a time limit.

. Collection of responses.

Stevick (1982:128-129) distinguished the features of games as following:

1-The common things between all players: the ability to play the game and the necessary goals (**cards**, a **disc**, and a **board**).

2-The rules of the game: any restrictions on the players' action still leave them free enough so that their actions are not entirely predictable.

3-The goal of the game: the goal should be mentioned by the teacher in order that students know what the objectives of the game are.

Types of games:

Slattery and William (2001:49) suggest that there are many types of games including **memory** and **guessing games** which will help

learners become familiar with new vocabulary in an enjoyable way. Wright, Betteridge and Bukby (2009) believe that "Guessing games can create conditions in which the use of the target language is necessary for leading players to the correct guess". Similarly, memory games "Challenge the players` ability to remember" (P:139). Musilova (2010:17-18) has also suggested the following various types of games:

1-Cooperative games: these games are really important; their aim is mutual cooperation among students. They are valuable when teachers have got new group of students or they want to involve weak or shy students in the group.

2-Communicative games: they concentrate on information exchanging. Students get information and they must react to it. It is usually a pair or group work.

3-Competitive games: the aim of this type is to finish the game as soon as possible just before others. They are mostly used when the teacher wants to make any change, his/her students are tired.

4-Code-control games: playing this game, students must use language without mistakes when because they are controlled by the teacher.

The role of the teacher while using games in teaching vocabulary:

The role of the teacher is more important for achieving desired results with the use of games in vocabulary instruction. As it is acknowledged that, presenting vocabulary is not as an easy task as it seems to be at the first sight. Teachers should be aware of different techniques for showing their students what new words mean. They can choose different strategies to present the meaning of words, with every possible application of various methods. Kopecek (2010: 12)

also believes that teachers have find the best ways of making the process of teaching vocabulary more effective and permanent, and to help them to find their personal style of vocabulary learning. In addition, focuses on different aspect of the teacher`s role stating that "Personality of the teacher could be definitely inspiring for pupils.
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If the teacher is an interesting person and talks about interesting things, she/he could easily attract pupils in the lesson who are not certainly persuaded about the importance of the subject". Therefore, the job of the teacher is to make her/his lesson interesting. Harmer (2004:12) asserts that "Good teachers are able to balance the serious teaching of English with more entertaining activities that they think their students sometimes need. By watching their classes, and asking their students what they think and feel, they can select a judicious blend of activity and style". Kopecek (2010:15) holds different views and states that students need to rely on their teachers. They need to know that teachers are well prepared and whatever they do in classes is done with clear goals and objectives, and that there are no haphazard activities. If students feel interested, they are highly prepared to prevail against disinterest and today attention to the course of events in the class. Haynes (2007:14-15) believes that the teachers can easily involve the learners in the activities and games, to make shy or weak pupils do any activity that they want them to do. According to Jones and Issortt (2005:11) the teacher`s role is largely passive and he/she must be responsible for:

1-Preparing the material in sufficient quantities.

2-Explaining clearly what to be done.

3-Checking answers at the end of an activity.

Thus, it is expected that the teacher must go around the class listening and monitoring their progress and only interfering or helping if absolutely necessary. That is the role of a teacher, while using games, can best be described as an umpire, instructing the players and controlling the game, making minute observations, giving hints and encouraging students in their efforts.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of using games in teaching vocabulary for Libyan students at primary schools. Despite of the importance of the use of games in teaching vocabulary is rare, they require qualified teachers, sufficient time, small numbers of students, suitable class and available teaching aids. Although, games consume time and effort, they increase the quality of teaching and provide good learning situations. Students are merely accustomed to receive instruction from the teachers and respond accordingly in the classroom and the best way of teaching vocabulary is by using games because students can benefit from exchange information. Teachers make sure that all the students make use of these games which distributed to students` achievement. In other words, games provide opportunities for disruptive students and give these students direct responsibility and make them feel they matter.

Thus, the students lack enough time and adequate games to practise the language inside the classroom. Although, these games are concerned as one of the techniques that used in teaching vocabulary so these games should be used in teaching vocabulary in order to enhance the students` awareness and motivation. In other words, games help create a space for the acquisition of English language the use of games may also reduce students` underachievement in

learning English by helping them express themselves freely in the target language at different ways and situations. The necessity of using a variety of games such as: **songs**, **drama** and **role- play** with the use of **audio-visual aids** certainly would help increase students` command of the learnt language. Moreover, the use of interesting games can encourage students to practise their linguistic back ground of English in creative atmosphere and gain confidence. Teachers should use games because young learners love them, in many cases, they fairly call for them. They consider games as a natural part of their lives something they need to surround them to evoke enjoyable and friendly environment.

To sum up, teaching vocabulary to students requires teachers to adopt a variety of vocabulary teaching strategies and techniques suitable to the students' nature, needs and interests.

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