A Case Study of Learning Vocabulary through Games Affective Factors- Motivation

Zulaykho Pardayeva

Ajou University in Tashkent ESP Instructor

INTRODUCTION

English has become an important global language of communication and in recent years, it has expanded throughout the world. Vocabulary is one of the aspects, which is central to English language teaching and learning because without a good knowledge of vocabulary, students cannot comprehend others or express their own beliefs. In order to communicate well in a foreign language, students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately. The main purpose of the case study was to study the effectiveness of using vocabulary games to improve vocabulary knowledge. This paper focuses on two interesting games in helping the student to acquire vocabulary knowledge.

Learning vocabulary through games is the most effective way. Games are considered as a good strategy for teaching vocabulary to the especially second language learners. They encourage learners to direct their energy towards language learning by providing them with meaningful context. In addition, games automatically involve student's interest and help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. Games can increase students' level of attention and persistence in learning. The results show that students preferred using games to learn because not only it was fun and exciting but also it facilitated vocabulary retention. This draws my attention to the affective factors on the second language vocabulary acquisition especially motivation.

Literature Review

According to Meara (1996) "Lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence". In other words, vocabulary is essential for communication, it is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together. However, in many ESL classes, even where teachers have devoted much time to vocabulary teaching, the results have been disappointing. Allen (1983) states that sometimes, after months or even years of learning English, many of the words most need to be learned, especially in countries where English is not the main language of communication, but with games they are kept in mind forever. Vocabulary is needed in the process of teaching and learning. If learners do not know the meaning of the words, they will not be able to understand what they see, read and learn. Thus, building up useful vocabulary is central to the learning of a foreign language.

According to Thornburg (2002), "The ability of English will improve significantly if we learn more words. We can say very little with grammar, but we can say almost everything with words and study the effectiveness of using vocabulary games to improve vocabulary knowledge".

Knowing and motivating to learn vocabulary is very important. However, with the help of games it is much easier. As to Wright et al (1979), "Learners are more likely to experience the meaning of the language when using it in a game than when they are using it in a conventional drill in a class. If the learners respond to the content in a positive way, it means that the language that they are acquiring is meaningful as they are amused, challenged, intrigued or even surprised". Thus, is

crucial to give importance to the meaning of the language because children will learn more vividly and therefore, they will better remember the contents.

Lewis and Bedson (1999) mention the fact that playing games is a vital and natural part of growing up and learning. Through games, children experiment, discover and interact with their environment. They add variation to a lesson and raise motivation by providing encouragement to use the target language. The game context in itself makes the foreign language immediately useful to the children as it brings the target language alive. In addition, games provide enjoyment and relaxation, but they incentive students to use their language in a creative and communicative manner.

Lee (1995) lists several main advantages when games are used in the classroom, including "a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class", "motivating and challenging" "effort of learning", and "language practice in the various skills."

Ersoz (2000) holds that games are highly appreciated thanks to their amusement and interest. Teachers can use games to help their students practice more their skills of communication.

In addition, Uberman (1998) also affirms the helpful role of games in vocabulary teaching after quoting and analyzing different opinions of experts. From her own teaching experiences, Uberman observed the enthusiasm of her students in learning through games. She considers games a way to help students not only enjoy and entertain with the language they learn, but also practice it incidentally.

However, according to Decarrico (2001), the vocabulary used in such context is rather simple because grammatical and phonologic aspects are emphasized; and as a result, the lexical aspect is neglected. In other words, learners just know how to use the vocabulary in an exact form, but they do not know how to use it with different shades of meanings in real life communication.

As Cameron (2001) points out "Every time children meet familiar words, they have changed and will bring new first language and conceptual knowledge to the vocabulary". According to Locke (1993), the acquisition of the word meanings takesmuch longer than the acquisition of the spoken form of the words so children use the words in their speech before they have a full comprehension of them. The vocabulary development is a continuous process in which, children do not only add new words to their existing vocabulary bank but also build up knowledge about words they already know partially. Learning a word requires a long time and plenty of exposure to the word used in different situations.

Hatch and Brown (1995:372) also claim that "learning words is a continuous process that changes, as children get older".The power of gamification has widely been acknowledged in education to engage and motivate learners when used properly in the classroom. (Hammer and lee 2011; Muntean, 2011.)

Participant profile

In my case study, I decided to choose one of my students. She is going to enter the University. Actually, there are fifteen students in my course. Eight of them are girls and the others are boys. They are all very clever and eager to learn English as a second language. Most of the students have problems on different skills. Yet, I am going to focus on one of them in 304 group whose name is M. she is eighteen years old and she really wants to acquire the language both fluently and accurately. M is a well - behaved girl. She likes listening to English music. She is very attentive at the lessons. Her learning style is deliberative. She is god at lectures and interview. Whenever there is something that is formal, she is eager to do it. Nevertheless, there was one common problem with

the student she had difficulty remembering and retaining English vocabulary that she had learnt. Traditional way of teaching like filling gap, multiple choice questions, and worksheets did not work actually. Because she was not motivated with these old and simple methods of teaching. As they are rather boring. So still, she had problem. Maybe it was because of her culture. Because she is a natural Uzbek girl. Her living atmosphere is not English. She is the only member who is learning English as a second language in her house. There is no one who knows the English language around her. The role that culture plays is great while learning second language. In view of that, I wanted to organize the lesson in quite different an interesting and interactive way in order to motivate her to review vocabulary. However, before carrying it out I tested her so that I compared her pre and post ability.

Research design

Motivation SLA theory leaves no doubt about the crucial importance of a further affective variable, motivation, which is actually a cluster of factors that "energize behavior and give it direction. Thus, the concept of language learning motivation has become central to a number of theories of SLA, and motivation has been widely accepted by teachers and researchers as one of the key factors influencing the rate and success of L2 learning. The use of games increases students' motivation because when faced with a challenging task they will fully engaged. Therefore, in order to enhance motivation, teachers can incorporate game elements into work activities. (Shneiderman, 2004). In these two weeks, I tried to organize the lesson creatively with games. Moreover, I want to share two of them. Actually, I applied several games with students and all worked well.

The first day

Before beginning the lesson, I told the students that today very interesting activities were waiting for them. They got motivated as soon as I told the word 'Game'. Here they had intrinsic motivation to perform the task. 'Intrinsic motivation is an internal desire to do a task and results in high-quality learning and creativity'. After hearing that there would be rewards for the winners. they were happy from extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is fueled by the anticipation of reward from outside. Example: money, prizes, grades and so on.

One of the game, which I practiced in the classroom called 'Picture Bingo'. This game requires some time to organize so that's why I needed some preparation for that game beforehand. However, it was worth spending time on it.I made bingo sheet and pictures to each square in a category 'Illness'. 'Virtually different categories can be used for example family, food, names etc. We tried them on the other days too'. I chose illness. Then I selected a list of vocabulary words from students' textbook related to the category.I wrote those words into separate sheet of paper, one word in one paper then hanged those papers on different places of the wall surrounding students. Before beginning the game, I introduced the rule of game to the students. The students who could not understand the game, asked me some questions. I explained it again. Then I divided students into two teams. Each group formed a line leading to the blackboard.

Their task was to choose one word paper on the wall and go to the blackboard, put it into suitable picture sheet, searching among the pictures. When given a signal they hurried to find the word paper and run to the blackboard to match appropriate picture. When the first participant was able to do that task, he or she went to the back of the line and then the second participant's turn to match. If any of the participant could not manage the task that group lost one point. After finishing, the game we calculated how many lost points each group got. Then it was clear who the winner group was. Each member of the winner group was awarded.Then there was a questionnaire after the game

related to the category illness. I gave that questionnaire to the students in order to check whether they kept the vocabulary words in mind or not. Then we checked it together with group.

The next day

The next lessons students asked to play game again when they had to learn vocabulary, they said it worked for them. Then I decided to have a game lesson again. This time I came with another game. It is called 'Mystery word'. For that game I needed sticky labels, one handout per students. I prepared a list of words that students learnt at the previous lessons, and then wrote vocabulary word in a sticky label using the list words. There was one for each student. There were the more sticky labels the more students were. In each label there was the vocabulary word hidden.We all moved the tables and desks to the edge of the room. Moreover, I told the students that they were going to play a game to review vocabulary. They needed a pen, a sheet of paper and a book to prop their handout on while writing.

Then I divided students into two group, and explained the game. I taped sticky labels onto students' back with a vocabulary word written. The task was to find and write as many words as they could, on their sheet of paper. Students began walking around the room asking other students questions about their word to figure out which word they had, or they guessed the hidden word by giving definition. Students might answer only yes or no to the questions asked of them. Here students had to protect their own words and prevent other students from seeing it. They tried to keep their back to the wall. In addition, I explained that students could not stand still for more than four or five second. There was no touching too. They tried to grab other students by shoulder to see the word on their back. I observed whether there was no copying from other students.

After fifteen minutes, I stopped students moving. They handed me their papers, which they had found the words written on it. Then we together with students counted the words of both groups'. The winner group who found much more words than the other was awarded.

Data collection and findings

At the beginning of the study, I tested the student's knowledge on vocabulary. Seeing the result I had a hesitation whether she would manage to learn even through games or nor, from her result I was not satisfied. And my concerns were that if I taught them vocabulary through games those who above level students would not be motivated. They would not want to play games like the pupils at school I thought. However, later while they were playing games I found out that they really got interested in the lesson. I knew it by their addressing to play games again.

I made a checklist of each student. I watched the student's participation at the lessons circulating the room in order to compare her last and current position and saw great shift. Students who had prior ability of English could easily understand the games and did not have difficulty playing. However, my student found it difficult to catch the games. She could not get on with at first. Because there were some students who were very active. Maybe they influence on her. She could not understand what the other students were doing and wandered how they keep those words in their mind so easily. I grouped her with the students who were active and told one of the students to help her. After then she felt confident and tried to participate in order not her group to lost. She tried for her group and later after she found out the rule of the game, she was getting active day by day. By the way, I tried those games several times but each time with another vocabulary words or categories. She really wanted to play games because she was easily acquiring vocabulary through games. Fortunately, interesting games motivated her to take part in the lesson. She was getting

active day by day. Students were eager to play games; even they were not tired after long hours' lessons. Finally, I tested the student on vocabulary and I can say that she was completely changed.

Conclusion

Chomsky (1988) points out the importance of activating learners' motivation: "The truth of the matter is that about 99 percent of teaching is making the students feel interested in the material". Both Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is needed in learning a process. Especially while learners are learning the materials which are very difficult to master. However, games can motivate students.

From my experience with students, I can say that games motivated not only the student who had lack of ability to learn but also the other students too. They all played games with pleasure. Especially M, her knowledge was really improved. However, we had some difficulties too, like culture because she lives in an atmosphere that in her home there are the members who are not eager to play games, all of them are workers, so after puberty. She is an only child in her family who may play.

General Conclusion Considering that vocabulary is a basic skill in English language. It is very important for teachers to choose a method that gathers all the factors of facilitating learning for them in a suitable way. Many studies agree that language games, as a teaching technique, have a great effect on the learners" vocabulary improvement (knowledge, memorization and use) as well as on his psychological side (motivation, relaxation and self-confidence). So I can say that applying games to learn vocabulary worked effectively. The student who I chose as a model completely changed. She grasped all materials with the help of games. Now results from her post test show that learning through games is an effective means to make students feel more comfortable, interested and motivated.

Reference

1. Chomsky (1988) "*The importance of activating learners' motivation*"

2. Harmer, J (2005) "*How to Teach English. An Introduction to the Practice of English Language Teaching*".

3. Hatch, E. and Brown, C. (1995). "*Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education*". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4. Hatch and Brown (1995:372) "*Learning words is a continuous process*"

5. Lee, W. (1979). "*Language Teaching Games and Contests*". Oxford: Oxford University Press.

6. Meara, P. (2005). "*Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*". Oxford Students Dictionary. New Edition. Oxford University Press

7. Uberman (1998) "*The helpful role of games in vocabulary teaching*"

8. Wright, (1984). "*Games for Language Learning*". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.