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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING VOCABULARY THROUGH GAMES

The students usually feel bored in vocabulary lessons because they have not changed their learning habits, such as writing words on paper, trying to learn by heart or learning passively through the teacher's explanations. To help students find language classes, especially vocabulary lessons more interesting, and to achieve more from games, we conducted action research to find the answer to the question, "Do games help students learn vocabulary effectively, and if so, how?" After reviewing academic opinions on this specifically focussed matter, of which there are relatively few, we began action research which included applying games in the classes, observing other teachers' classes, and interviewing both teachers and learners so as to elicit students' reactions, feelings and the effectiveness of games in vocabulary learning. The research shows they are effective in helping students to improve their vocabulary building skills.

The game - one of the most important means of intellectual and moral education of children. Great importance to the game as an educational tool attached AS Makarenko, "What child is in the game, is that in many ways it will work when she grows up. Therefore, education of the future leader is, above all in the game. "Lessons from the use of games and game situations are an effective means of training and education, as the rest of the traditional construction of the lesson and the introduction of the game story attracted the attention of the entire class. The content of the game - it's always a number of learning tasks. In the game pupils get into a situation that allows them to critically assess their knowledge in an active step, cause this knowledge into the system.

The use of games in the English lessons promotes communicative activity character education lessons focus on the psychological development of students rechemyslitelnoy means the language is spoken, optimization of intellectual activity

of students in the learning process, the complexity of learning, development and intensification of its forms of group work. We all know that it is easier to memorize something that is interesting, but it is interesting that exciting, does not cause boredom. In an entertaining form of a game you can work out and repeat the course material, greatly add to your active vocabulary, and strengthen the skills to get the correct spelling of English words.

The game - a huge incentive to succeed where sometimes ineffective many traditional exercises. The lesson can be an unforgettable journey into the world of the English language, to enable not only strong, but weak students show their creativity. Even the most insignificant success - a huge step towards knowledge.

Problem

In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together. 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.

Even though students realize the importance of vocabulary when learning language, most students learn vocabulary passively due to several factors. First, they consider the teacher's explanation for meaning or definition, pronunciation, spelling and grammatical functions boring. Second, students only think of vocabulary learning as knowing the primary meaning of new words.

Therefore, they ignore all other functions of the words. Third, students usually only acquire new vocabulary through new words in their textbooks or when given by teachers during classroom lessons. For example, learners find many new words in a text and then ask the teacher to explain the meanings and usage. Fourth, many learners do not want to take risks in applying what they have learnt. Students may recognize a word in a written or spoken form and think that they already "know the word", but they may not be able to use that word properly in different contexts or pronounce it correctly.

In recent years, communicative language teaching (CLT) has shown its effectiveness in teaching and learning language. CLT is an approach that helps

students be more active in real life situations through the means of individual, pair and group work activities. It encourages students to practice the language they learn in meaningful ways. In a CLT classroom, playing vocabulary games is one of the activities which requires students to actively communicate with their classmates, using their own language. Thus the question we began to examine is, "Do games help students learn vocabulary effectively and if so, how?"

Literature review

Learners of English have to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary during their language acquisition. In order to learn and retain new words, learners should participate in different task-based activities in their classroom whether it is a guessing task, a describing exercise or conversation making. Such activities also include vocabulary games which especially focus on helping learners develop and use words in different contexts by making the lessons enjoyable. Therefore, it is necessary to explore whether students learn vocabulary effectively through games and how they learn it.

Traditionally, vocabulary has not been a particular subject for students to learn, but has been taught within lessons of speaking, listening, reading and writing. During the lesson, students use their own vocabulary and are introduced to new words provided by the teacher and classmates which they apply to classroom activities. For many learners of English, whenever they think of vocabulary, they think of learning a list of new words with meanings in their native language without any real context practice. A number of learners may share the same experience of looking up words in a bilingual dictionary to find their meanings or definitions when they encounter new words. They may even write down lines of new words without any idea of the real use of them in context. Working this way, after a short period of time, many learners may find out that learning vocabulary in lists does not satisfy themselves, and they think the cause for it is just their bad memorization. Research and publications have shown that this is not a very effective way to study. Decarrico (2001) states that words should not be learnt separately or by memorization without understanding. Moreover, "learning new words is a cumulative process, with words enriched and

established as they are met again".Therefore, the "look and remember" way of vocabulary learning seems to be not very effective for learners of the English language.

Furthermore, some other students may require teachers to give meaning and grammatical function for words that they are not familiar. Learners just wait for teachers who control the lesson to provide new forms of words then they write those words in their notebooks or complete their exercises. They may use words they learn in the exact formats as the original patterns in which those words appeared. This kind of rote verbal memorization is good to a certain extent since it helps learners learn and use the correct form of words. 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.

Unlike the traditional method of learning and teaching, in a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, learners are required to take part in a number of meaningful activities with different tasks. This is to improve learners' communicative competence by encouraging them to be a part of the lessons themselves. Newton (2001) refers to this approach as a way that can enable learners to manage their vocabulary meaning and develop their communicative skills at the same time. Many experts of language teaching methodology also agree that playing games is a good way to learn vocabulary, especially in CLT class. With the use of games, the teacher can create various contexts in which students have to use the language to communicate, exchange information and express their own opinions.

Some experts have also figured out characteristics of games that make vocabulary learning more effectively. Lee (1995:35) 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.

In summary, games are useful and effective tools that should be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of vocabulary is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and effective.

To assess the effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games in the classroom, we want to know how students' experiences help with their learning and what progress they gain. Specifically, can we apply games as an effective means to make students feel more comfortable and interested in learning the subject of vocabulary, which, in Vietnam, is usually believed to be boring rather than enjoyable?

To achieve our goal, we focused on the perception and attitudes of our students as well as what students gained through their learning with vocabulary games. The plan involved conducting different kinds of games in our lessons so that we could see how students reacted to this method of learning vocabulary. We also wanted to find if there were any problems that occurred during the process of teaching. In addition, in line with research methodology and principles (Robertson, 2002) it was necessary to enrich our perspectives by observing some experienced teachers' classes at HUFV, reviewing other teachers' lesson plans for games and interviewing some teachers and students as well.

Conclusion

Learning vocabulary has been considered a boring subject for a long time and the traditional way of learning vocabulary by mere copying and remembering has shown to be less than effective. Meanwhile, games are also seen as a time-filling activity in most English classrooms. It is believed that games are just for fun and they have very little effect in teaching and learning. However, our research reveals that

games contribute to vocabulary learning if they give students a chance to learn, practice and to review the English language in a pleasant atmosphere. From the research, we found that students are demanding a new way of teaching vocabulary, and they themselves are in search of a new way of learning this subject as well.

Under such circumstances, games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. First, games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help 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 participate actively 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.

Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However, in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is essential that suitable games are 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.

In conclusion, learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms. The results of this research suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence.