




Efl games and vocabulary acquisition: Enhancing foreign language learning in the classroom

Juegos efl y la adquisición de vocabulario: Mejora del aprendizaje de lenguas en el aula

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Resumen

El uso de juegos para la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés en la educación actual se ha evitado debido a diferentes aspectos como tiempo, metodologías, estrategias y preferencias personales que tienen algunos tutores. Sin embargo, algunos educadores están de acuerdo con la idea de tener actividades lúdicas para ayudar a los alumnos a mejorar sus habilidades lingüísticas. El presente estudio tiene el propósito de investigar los efectos del uso de juegos de EFL para mejorar la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés de los estudiantes utilizando un método de investigación preexperimental. La población considerada para esta investigación fueron 20 estudiantes, 11 masculinos y 9 femeninos con un rango de edad entre 14 a 16 años de 1° nivel de bachillerato del colegio Juan León Mera “La Salle”. La investigación tuvo ocho intervenciones, dos encuentros de vocabulario de la unidad 1, dos sesiones de palabras de vocabulario de la unidad 2 y dos intervenciones de vocabulario de la unidad 3 para la aplicación del juego de EFL “Pictionary”, y una aplicación de pre-test y post-test (dividida en dos secciones, sinónimos y significado). Sin embargo, los estudiantes trabajaron asincrónicamente 6 veces para desarrollar su material de apoyo para practicar el vocabulario. Después de tres semanas de intervenciones, se recopilaron y analizaron datos cuantitativos utilizando el programa SPSS comparando los puntajes promedio de las pruebas, y se concluyó que los juegos de EFL tienen una mejora genuina en la adquisición de vocabulario.

Palabras clave: EFL games, Pictionary, Sinónimos y significado, adquisición del vocabulario

Abstract

The use of games for English vocabulary acquisition in nowadays education has been avoided due to different aspects such as time, methodologies, strategies, and personal preferences that some tutors have. However, some educators agree with the idea of having playful activities for helping learners improve their language skills. The present study has the purpose of investigating the effects of using EFL games for improving students' English vocabulary acquisition using a pre-experimental method of research. The population considered for this research were 20 students, 11 male and 9 female with an age range between 14 to 16 years old from 1st level baccalaureate at Juan León Mera “La Salle” school. The research had eight interventions were carried out, two meetings for vocabulary from unit 1, two sessions for vocabulary words of unit 2, and two interventions for unit 3 vocabulary for applying the EFL game “Pictionary”, and a pre-test and post-test (divided into two sections, synonyms, and meaning) application. Nevertheless, students worked asynchronously 6 times for developing their support material to practice vocabulary. After the three-week of interventions, quantitative data was gathered and analyzed using the SPSS program comparing the average scores from the tests, concluding that EFL games have a genuine improvement in vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: EFL Games, Pictionary, Synonyms and meaning, Vocabulary acquisition

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INTRODUCTION

A problem in language learning is the lack of vocabulary which also makes it difficult for learners to communicate (Dörner & Göbe 2016). For that reason, as a researcher and as a teacher, making learning fun is a more student-oriented type of teaching method and also a more teacher-satisfying outcome when observing positive results on students.

Currently, the methods, techniques, and teaching strategies are either imposed by an institution that maintains its way of teaching or many times they leave it up to the teacher's choice according to how they feel comfortable when teaching.

Backlund and Hendrix (2013) had the idea that educational games are used for only educational purposes. Both authors added also that serious games are activities that engage the participants and contribute to achieving an educational purpose.

Developing this research was of great importance since today in the educational field, the teaching and learning process of the English language is not very effective due to the lack of dynamic and innovative activities and resources that some institutions may have whether they are public institutions or simply because some of the teachers may not take advantage of them.

Hadfield (1999) explains that a game is an activity containing some elements between which we can find a goal, rules, and fun. The author mentions that there are two types of existing games, competitive games, and cooperative games. Competitive games are referred to participants or teams racing to be the first in accomplishing the stated goal. Meanwhile, in cooperative games participants work together towards a goal. It is worth mentioning that cooperative or collaborative games allow players to exchange ideas, information, and develop problem-solving skills.

According to Daesri (2002), a series of factors must be considered in the process of gaming while performed. Those factors regard rules, learning, and competition. Nowadays, thanks to technology, games have become a topic of interest in the educational field in the 21st century, and as technology grows, games will continue advancing and improving as well. In addition, games can be both virtual or physical to create learning experiences according to the learners needs and engage them to the process.

Educational Games

Even though it is considered that games have recently become a topic of interest in some places, educational games have always been part of teachers' techniques for their teaching and for helping the learners' learning process. Educational games have taken place in the field of education not only inside but outside the classrooms,

there is an uncountable number of educational games that improve and help for the teaching and learning process.

Vygotsky (1978) strongly believed that language learning is developed through social interactions with communicative purposes. For the author, language is one of the greatest means of communicating, hence, he proposed a theory that explained that learning a language has a basis on social interaction and it is developed in a collaborative context. The author meant that people learn by interacting with other individuals, and that learning occurs through experiences, interaction, and knowledge building. In other words, meaningful learning. As learners become competent, they are allowed to be more independent as it promotes cognitive development. In addition, the author suggests using cooperative activities to develop skills and strategies in the teaching and learning process.

Backlund and Hendrix (2013) had the idea that educational games are games used for only educational purposes. Both authors added also that serious games are activities that engage the participants and contribute to achieve an educational purpose. According to Dörner and Göbe (2016) serious games do include educational games. To avoid difficulties while having games in the classroom, it is crucial to make learners familiarize with the game's instructions. According to Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2006) once learners are familiar with the game and group work, games must be introduced in the following order:

1. Explanation by the teacher.
2. Demonstration of parts of the game by the teacher and volunteers.
3. Trial in front of the class.
4. Any instructions written on the board.
5. Try out the games by students.
6. Remove instructions from the board.
7. Continue the game.

Language Games

Rooyackers (1994) mentions that a language is seriously powerful, and it can bring fun. The author declares that language games can make language powerful since they enrich each other. In addition, according to the author they can be used for learners of all ages and in courses in general but specially for English, writing, poetry, drama and speaking classes. Rooyackers (1994) points that language games are designed to encourage appreciation of language as many learners feel intimidated by using the language publicly, however, by using games learners become confident in a noncompetitive environment. While playing, learners are invited to foster their creativity. Games which involve new words is a way to make learners familiarize with them, these language games allow learners to collect, associate with sounds, retain, and become familiar with new vocabulary words from clues about their meaning or context.

With games, learners are challenged to use and experiment with new words and speaking is one of the best ways, as they must think in new words spontaneously. This helps learners to choose both easy and precise words. Besides, to develop social skills such as self-expression, listening and collaboration. Language games allow students learn how to express themselves in a collaborative activity, how to interact with their peers and, as they use language, self-confidence increases.

It is evident that language games serve for various educational purposes, as well as how valuable they are for the learners for their social and personal development inside and outside the classroom.

Pictionary

Pictionary was invented by Robert Angel in 1985. It implies players guessing words associated to a certain subject from drawings. Hinebaugh (2009) declared that Pictionary is appropriate as a teaching tool for teachers and for learners who are learning a second or a foreign language. In addition, it develops their communicative and creative skills. The author added that the rules are established to develop critical thinking and reinforce ideas for visual learners, in other words, players must be creative and create designs to communicate ideas properly.

The game is designed for players to work in groups. The dynamic of this game is easy and appropriate for everyone to have the opportunity to be part of it. However, the rules and steps can be adapted based on the players needs and interests. First of all, teams are formed. Then, players can volunteer to start or by throwing the dice to have a winner. Secondly, one participant from one team throws the dice, moves the pin to the corresponding square and takes a card. According to the color of the square the player must draw the word belonging to the same color. Then players from both teams are able to guess the vocabulary word. Once the word is said, the team that guessed wins the next turn, and so on until the board is completed.

Reasons for using games in English classrooms

Sigurðardóttir (2010) mentioned that games deserve to be included in language classrooms for several reasons, he mentions 7 reasons why it is worth using games in English classes. First, because games are fun. The author considers it as important as fun games help activate students who were inactive in previous activities or classes because of the lack of interest, motivation, dynamic activities, etc. Agreeing with the author, having, and keeping active students is form importance as they oversee their own learning, if learners are not engaged, they do not learn. Secondly, games give learners the opportunity to build relationships with their peers and develop confidence. Having games in the classroom can provide chances to create a friendly and positive atmosphere to learn in and give the sense of diversity for a good environment.

Another reason that Sigurðardóttir (2010) gives is that games are a good way for learners to have opportunities to practice language skills and learn real-life language for real-life situations while improving fluency. Using games for class force students to take on more responsibility with bigger roles in any activity. A fourth reason that the author mentions, is that games allow students to be exposed to the language in many different situations.

Furthermore, a fifth reason comes to be emotionally involved. Emotions have also a role in language learning, which the same author says that games enable learners to feel confident in the learning process. By playing a game the atmosphere that is created is not as serious as other situations in which learners are asked to participate, and with no emphasis in grammatical structures but in fluency. Finally, the author affirms that games are a good strategy when teaching not only English but different subjects as they tend to develop interest. And one advantage is that games can be used with learners of all ages making it ideal for working in schools with age diversity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study applied a quantitative approach with EFL games as an independent variable and self-confidence as the dependent variable with a total of 20 students, 11 women and 9 men with an age range from 14 – 19 years old from 1st level of baccalaureate at Juan Leon Mera “La Salle” in Ambato, Ecuador who were chosen using a convenience sampling technique.

The research design was a pre-experimental to determine the hypothesis of the variables. The researcher proposed causal hypothesis as follow: H0: EFLgames do not have an effect on English vocabulary acquisition in students from 1st Baccalaureate.

H1: EFL games have an effect on English Vocabulary acquisition in students from 1st Baccalaureate.

Instruments

To evaluate students' vocabulary knowledge of the English language, a standardized Pre-preliminary English Test PET vocabulary test was used. It was focused on two sections: meaning and synonyms to give students the ease to relate words and remember their meaning. It was used as a pre and post-test.

Materials

EFL game Pictionary board game and cards adapted to the units 1, 2, and 3 form Achievers B1+ book and a dice in order to make students perform their drawings. Web resources also were used such as Canvas Presentations, and digital tools.

Data collection method

The researcher used pre-test and post-test for the pre-experimental research. The pre-test was applied at the beginning of the study to diagnose students' knowledge of vocabulary. Then the treatment was applied in 6 interventions. During the interventions, the researchers used EFL games using board games, dice, and flashcards to enhance vocabulary through a Presentation Practice Production instructional model.

Data Analysis

In furtherance of testing the hypothesis of research, a normality test Shapiro-Wilk with SPSS program was used. Based on the normality test, the Wilcoxon test is established as the statistical test for hypothesis validation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In furtherance of knowing the overall score of students' improvements, a comparison of both tests was made. Table 1 demonstrates students' overall score in the pre-test with 7,2 and the same test administered after the experiment with a result of 12,2 over 15 points. It is asserted that by comparing the pre-test and the post-test the researcher was able to notice that the average score increased 5 points in students' vocabulary acquisition after using EFL games.

With this improvement, the lower limit of the post-test confidence interval is above the upper limit of the pre-test, in that sense, it can be assumed a significant difference that proves the improvement in vocabulary acquisition after the application of the experiment. Convincingly, in graphic 1 the peak of the students' scores is at 7 points, with the rest of the scores distributed between 3 and 9 and one student with 14 in the pre-test. Meanwhile, in the post-test the highest density of the data is between 11 and 15 with the peak at 11 points, and no student obtained 13 points.

Based on the normality test, the Wilcoxon test is established as the statistical test for hypothesis validation. The hypothesis tests were applied using the following criteria:

With a level of significance at 5%, the rule of decision is: $H_0:Sig >0.05$ $H_1:Sig \leq 0.05$ According to the results, the differences are significant in all the comparisons made between the pre-test and post-test. As a result, it can be said that the mean of the pre-test results is different from the mean of the post-test results. Conclusively, there is enough statistical evidence that EFL games have an effect on English vocabulary acquisition, in other words, the alternative hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis was rejected.

95% confidence interval of the difference	Upper	11163
Lower	8291	13234
Std. deviation	2331	2215
Minimum	3000	8000
Maximum	14000	15000

Table 1. Pre and post-test results

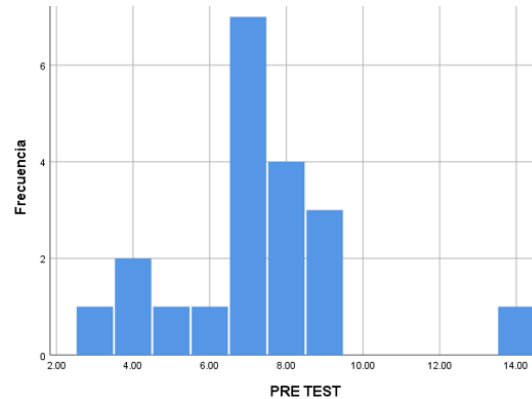


Figure 1: Pre-test results

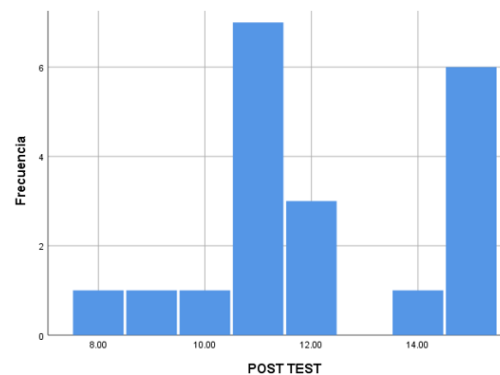


Figure 2: Post-test results

In furtherance of knowing the overall score of students' improvements, a comparison of both tests was made. Students' overall score in the pre-test with 7,2 and the same test was administered after the experiment with a result of 12,2 over 15 points. It is asserted that by comparing the pre-test and the post-test the researcher was able to notice that the average score increased 5 points in students' vocabulary acquisition after using EFL games. With this improvement, in Table 1 the lower limit of the post-test confidence interval is above the upper limit of the pre-test, in that sense, it can be assumed a significant difference that proves the improvement in vocabulary acquisition after the application of the experiment. Convincingly, in Figures 1 and 2, the peak of the student's scores is at 7 points, with the rest of the scores distributed

Pre-test and Post-test results "Synonyms and meaning" Statistical	Pre-test	Post-test
Media	7200	12200

between 3 and 9 and one student with 14 in the pre-test. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the highest density of the data is between 11 and 15 with the peak at 11 points, and no student obtained 13 points.

CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the application of English as Second Language games for vocabulary acquisition, a positive effect on students' vocabulary was noticeable in two sections primarily: synonyms and meaning. It is a fact that the population showed improvement in their vocabulary competence after the application of EFL games.

From the results obtained in the PET adapted standardized vocabulary pre-test and the post-test, students increased their vocabulary knowledge after being part of the experiment with EFL games. It was confirmed that students' vocabulary knowledge increased significantly after the experiment and the results were shown in the comparisons with the pre-test and the post-test.

The results evidenced that applying EFL games help improve learners' vocabulary knowledge since they get exposed to vocabulary words while playing the game and acquire lexis unconsciously. In addition, working collaboratively gave students the opportunity to develop their social skills, critical-thinking skills and showed more confidence when performing the activities.

After checking and comparing the overall results obtained in the vocabulary pre and post-test, EFL games for vocabulary acquisition were confirmed as effective for students' vocabulary acquisition and knowledge since the overall score of the pre-test before using EFL games was 7,2 points. Furthermore, after using EFL games students' final score improved to 12,2 significantly. There was a significant difference of 5 points after the interventions.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

The authors contributed to the conceptualization of the research study by identifying the need to investigate the effectiveness of EFL games in vocabulary acquisition. This involved analyzing relevant studies and findings, synthesizing the literature review and designing and developing the research methodology.

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