Using Game Strategy for Motivating Students to Learn New English Vocabulary

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Abstract: *This research addresses the problem of memorizing new vocabulary and their definitions in general and motivating students to memorize those scientific vocabularies in particular. This research examines the implementing of games as an effective learning strategy to acquire new vocabulary, solve this problem in an interesting way, and raise the students' awareness to study and to get the maximum results. The outcome of this research showed that it can increase students' ability and motivation to memorize new words. The data extracted from three sources: a questionnaire is designed and used as a tool to collect the data, the researcher observation and the regular exams. The results of this research demonstrate clearly that using games to practice vocabulary improves learners' ability to memorize the new words effectively. Games provide logical contribution while learners interact in the group, allowing students to clarify the meanings of the words. This strategy also enhanced students' enthusiasm to learn new vocabulary of scientific English.*

Key words: *learning strategy, games, vocabulary, motivation, teaching strategy.*

استخدام استراتيجية الألعاب لتحفيز الطلاب لتعلم مفردات انجليزية جديدة

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الملخص: يتناول هذا البحث مشكلة حفظ المفردات والمفاهيم العلمية الجديدة وتعاريفها بشكل عام وتحفيز المتعلمين على حفظ تلك المفردات على وجه الخصوص. كما يتناول هذا البحث تطبيق او استخدام الالعاب المختلفة كاستراتيجية فعالة اثناء الدرس لاكتساب وحفظ المفردات الانكليزية العلمية الجديدة ، والحد من مشكلة صعوبة حفظ هذه المفردات بطريقة مثيرة ومشوقة ، و رفع مستوى الوعي لدى المتعلمين للدراسة و الحصول على أقصى قدر من النتائج . وأظهرت نتائج هذا البحث أنه يمكن رفع كفاءة المتعلمين وتحفيزهم على حفظ الكلمات الجديدة بتطبيق هذه الإستراتيجية. وتم الحصول على بيانات هذه الدراسة من ثلاثة مصادر : المصدر الاول, تصميم استبيان و استخدامه كأداة لجمع البيانات، والمصدر الثاني، من خلال رصد ومشاهدة الباحث للمتعلمين والمصدر الثالث ، هو الامتحانات العادية التي خضع لها المتعلمين . تبين نتائج هذا البحث بوضوح أن ممارسة الألعاب الهادفة خلال الدرس تحسّن من قدرة المتعلمين من خلال التدريب الفعّال على حفظ الكلمات الجديدة. كما تتيح هذه الإستراتيجية الفرصة للمتعلم للمساهمة والتفاعل بشكل مجموعات ، مما يسمح لمجاميع لطلاب لتوضيح معاني الكلمات. كما عززت هذه الاستراتيجية الحماس للمتعلمين لحفظ مفردات جديدة في اللغة الإنجليزية العلمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إستراتيجية التعلم، إستراتيجية التدريس، مفردات، الالعاب، تحفيز .

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1. Introduction

Learning new scientific concepts in different subjects: Math, Chemistry, Physics and Biology represent serious problem to memorize this big amount of new vocabulary. Vocabulary, however, is the basic element of a language. As "a good command of vocabulary is indispensable in every stage of English language" (Li, 2005:168), memorizing vocabulary is very important for English learning especially in Qatar nowadays where a study of memory strategies for English vocabulary is very necessary to improve Scientific English of the secondary school learners. Some remarks have confirmed the weaknesses of the students to memorize new vocabulary throughout conducting survey, questionnaires, interviews and the quizzes.

The vocabulary in scientific English lessons in Raba'a Al-Adawia Independent Secondary School for Girls, Doha- State of Qatar is mostly taught through implementing the normal strategies such as the use of flashcards and teaching new words in context not as isolated words but some students have shown no motive to memorize those vocabulary.

The study is conducted on twenty-seven students Grade Ten. According to the author experience, the teaching of scientific concepts relies on the drilling of the new vocabulary to help the students to memorize and produce the correct pronunciation of these words. Other strategies of teaching such as implementing games are occasionally used to teach vocabulary and they are only used for a limited time. This is because games are considered time consuming by some traditional teachers who prefer to use drilling as a direct way of teaching and practicing vocabulary where the research has been conducted. Although Arabic language is the general medium of instruction in the school, the students in the English classes are encouraged to speak in English while they interact with their classmates. Translation is generally avoided, but it is sometimes used to clarify some difficult scientific concepts which need to clarify their meanings.

According to the standards adopted by the Supreme of Education Council (SEC) in Qatar which requires to master as much as vocabulary level in different fields. The pre-university students are required to master a large amount of vocabulary to enable them in the new stage of their education.

The strategy of using games to motivate the student to understand and memorize new scientific vocabulary in English has been applied in Qatar. In order to make it clear, the Secondary Independent Schools in the State of Qatar are all under the direct supervision of the Supreme Education Council, which coordinates with Qatar University to train the teachers and extend their experiences through workshops, including focusing on using certain games strategy to teach English and Scientific English vocabulary to the students.

As memorizing the new words seems not effective enough therefore the students must improve their capacity and skills by using other different strategies.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the problem of memorizing the new scientific English vocabulary for Grade / 10 Class and to find out the most effective learning strategies that motivate and help the students to solve this problem.

The instrument that has been used in this study was eight-item questionnaire that consists of the three main categories; the first reveals that mastering new vocabulary is problematic case for those students. The second focuses on the language skill they find more difficult when learning new vocabulary. The third is the method or the strategy that can help the students to memorize new vocabulary effectively.

The effects of using games to practice vocabulary in the teaching of Scientific English to young learners are studied. Teaching vocabulary through games is chosen as the focus area for this research that it has been observed during the course of teaching this topic.

Consequently, the findings will be helpful to teachers to develop effective vocabulary teaching method and to offer students with successful vocabulary learning strategies.

2. The problem

To master scientific English concepts, students must pay attention to many aspects of language such as grammatical structure, spelling, and pronunciation and so on in order to reach a high degree of competence. One of the most important aspects is the vocabulary, which plays an important role for English learners.

In the field of English language learning, there are many factors that affect the students' knowledge level such as students 'learning styles, teachers' personality and teaching styles, students' background and so on. On the other hand, it has been detected that one of the most difficult problems of unsuccessful English education to grade -10 I secondary schools is that the students are demotivated to learn new vocabulary. Therefore, having limited vocabulary knowledge, students are not able to express and communicate well. Granowsky (2002) marks that; many researchers have confirmed the important role of vocabulary knowledge plays for students' comprehensive reading, and for their school success. For these reasons, the main purpose of this research is to generally explore students' vocabulary learning strategies and to examine, in particular, the effectiveness of game strategy to motivate the students at Raba'a Al-Adawia Independent Secondary School for Girls. A questionnaire has been conducted on twenty seven students of grade 10 and the outcome is shown in figures (1 & 2).

Figure (1) shows many learning strategies that the students prefer in learning new vocabulary whereas figure (2) shows the skill that the students face difficulty to learn new vocabulary, and to memorize new words in listening first and in reading second.
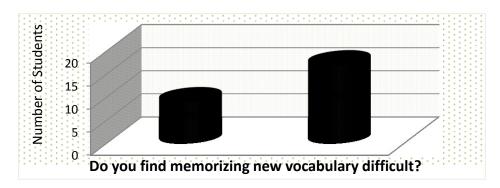

Figure (1) shows memorizing new vocabulary is problematic issue for the students.
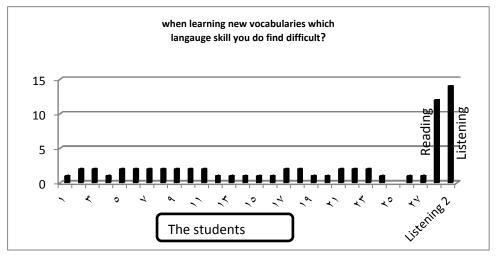
when learning new vocabularies which
langauge skill you do find difficult?

Figure (2) shows students' difficulties in listening and reading skills.

2.1. Significance of the Study

The teacher is implementing a new strategy by using games that motivate and encourage students to memorize new vocabulary in accordance with their need and desire and complies with the target of teaching.

2.2. Research Question

The following question is raised to be examined in this study: "Do games motivate and help students to acquire new vocabulary efficiently?

2.3. Literature Review

The previous literature and research related to language learning strategies and vocabulary learning strategies are considered next:

2.3.1 Definitions of Learning Strategies

Learning strategies (LS) have been defined as "behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning" (Lessard-Clouston, 1997) which are "intended to influence the learner's encoding process". More specifically definition of LS is given as "behaviors of a learner that are intended to influence how the learner processes information". Obviously, LS are involved in all learning, regardless of the content and context and accordingly, is used in learning and teaching mathematics, science, history, languages and other subjects, both in classroom setting sand other learning channels. Thus, learning strategies are generally known as techniques or learning process that students use to support their language learning.

2.3.2 Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Vocabulary is an area that has drained researchers' interest within the mainstream of the second language (L2) acquisition. Researchers realized that many learners' difficulties, both receptive and productive, result from an inadequate vocabulary and even when they are at higher levels of language competence and performance they still feel in need of learning vocabulary.

Hatch & Brown (1995), however, mention that vocabulary is central to Language and is of great significance to language learners. Words are the building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, and ideas without which people cannot convey the intended meaning. Accordingly, different approaches, techniques, exercises and practice have been introduced into the field of teaching vocabulary. The vocabulary knowledge is defined as a process or technique that students use to help them succeed in vocabulary learning.

2.3.3 Teachers' Strategies for Learning

The role of the teachers plays a crucial factor of vocabulary learning strategies and how students adopt these strategies effectively. Thus the principal focus of this study is to examine which vocabulary strategies the students use effectively so it will help teachers to design their lesson plans and to construct practical instructions to efficaciously support students' competence in English language. The learning strategy is designed as a process or methods that teachers use to help students master new vocabulary (Riankamol, N. 2008, page 1).

2.3.4 Game as a Vocabulary Learning Strategy

There are many learning strategies but this study focuses on game strategy to motivate students to memorize new words. However, motivation is considered one of the essential factors in language learning. Lightbown and Spada (1999) stress the importance of motivation and emphasize that "The principal way that teachers can influence learners' motivation is by making the classroom a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, (and) engaged in (the)activities" (p.163). Motivated learners have, however, a better chance of learning vocabulary successfully; unmotivated ones will have a lesser chance of success. Thus, in order to enhance learners' learning vocabulary, they need to be motivated by playing a game to complete the task, and with the enjoyment achieved, learning the lexis occurs smoothly (Moon, 2000). Therefore, learning new vocabulary through enjoyable and out of the ordinary ways may assist the learners to learn vocabulary. Accordingly, teachers should employ new vocabulary games that stimulate the students and tempt them to participate. Teachers should also consider games which are appropriate to students' age, cultural background and interests, and teacher should as well consider activities where students can experience success (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). It is worthwhile to mention that game learning strategy has also been used for high school students in a German class room and the foci of that study were vocabulary and word knowledge"). During the game students were able to understand and produce new language. They were also aware of the need to memorize vocabulary, articles, and prepositions" (Kuchenbecker, 2013).

3. Methodology

This section discusses the methodology used in collecting data for this study. The data collection procedure is explained, and how the questionnaires are distributed as described. Finally, data analysis is presented and analyzed.

3.1 The subjects

The subjects in this study are twenty seven students who are studying in Rabaa Al-Adawia Secondary School for Girls as mentioned above in the second semester of the academic year 2013.

The subjects' age ranged between 16 and 17 years of age and they are studying scientific English in grade10. They are all female subjects.

3.2 Preparation Details

A questionnaire is designed specifically for the purpose of this study and English language is used to collect data. The instrument used in this survey is a 3-item questionnaire for the students as follows (see the appendix): the first, is designed to recognize that the students really have problem in memorizing new vocabulary, the second to know their skill to face this problem and the third is formulated to see the different learning styles of the students under study as is shown in figure (3).

On the other hand, an exam of fifty items is designed to be given to the students at two stages; one before implementing the selected strategy and the second after implementing the target strategy.
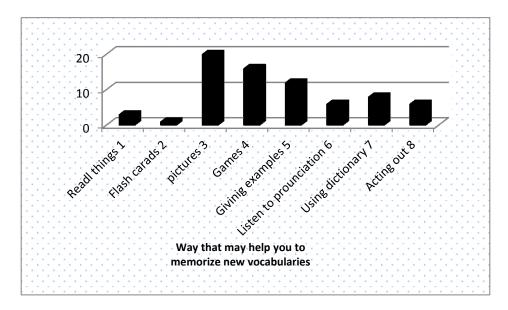

Figure (3) Different strategies for learning new vocabulary

3.4 The Procedure

In order to examine the effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games, the researcher aims to know how using games in the lesson can motivate the students and help them to feel happy while learning new vocabulary. To do this research, the teacher has conducted three different kinds of games in the lessons like: puzzles, Directions: "I Have Who Has" and Fly Swat Game, so that the teacher could see how students reacted to this method of learning vocabulary.

To find out the progress or problems that could happen during the application of the game, the teacher (researcher) has applied the three games in the class of scientific English for a month (a long eight lessons) and to learn how that improved their existing vocabulary. The researcher has further interviewed the learners orally to understand the development and progress in their process of learning vocabulary. This process is integrated by using an

exam of fifty items which has been given twice to the target students; before and after applying the strategy respectively.

Besides, it is essential to see other teachers' opinions and their feedback on using games as strategy to learn new vocabulary. Therefore, the observation of experienced teachers has helped us working out different ways of playing effective vocabulary games in the classes throughout their lesson plans and helpful advice.

4. Results and Discussions

Figures (4 and 5) show the students' success rate before and after applying the strategy and

Three main signs appeared from using games to practice vocabulary:

1. seems to grow the word memorization.
2. seems to raise student interaction.
3. seems to enhance student motivation.

After implementing the games and activities to practice vocabulary, and after practicing new words through the games along eight lessons for four weeks, i.e., it seems that students' ability for memorizing the new words has been come more effective. It is also noticed that students' ability to recall the words has increased. Sometimes the students say: 'We had this word in that game'; that reveals how well they remember these words.

The outcomes of this processes show that the students have good word standards in memorization, and getting high marks in their exams. the effectiveness of this strategy shows the increase of the students' performance and their rate of success (figure 4 and 5).
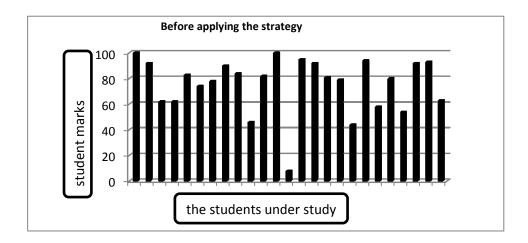

Figure (4) shows the students' success rate before applying the strategy.
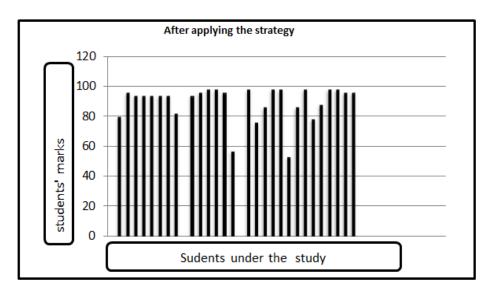
Figure (5) shows the students' success rate after applying the

However, when the students were interviewed to know their opinion about this strategy and the activities that demand thinking, the majority of them agreed about such games helped them in their spelling, and they would help them in their upcoming tests. One student said: it helped me a lot in writing correct spelling of the new words and that allows us to avoid spelling mistakes in the coming quizzes.

Thornburg (2002, p.25) has observed that "The more decisions the learners make about a word, and the more cognitively demanding these decisions, the better the word is remembered" . Accordingly, it appears that using games enhances students' capability of memorizing the words as for they activate learners' minds.

Another sign appeared from this study is that the students showed excellent interaction while using games and related activities. Moon (2000:p.73) states that "(Interaction) is the main source of language input".

The third sign appeared from the analysis, those games enhancing students' motivation. in accordance with Kyriacou (2001, p.23) who points out that "… Activities must elicit and sustain pupil's attention, interest and motivation".

Through the teacher observations and students' questions, it is noticed that most of the students are willing to play games and to have such activities where they can interact with each other. A peer assessment has described the students' motivation during a game as follows: "They are willing to do the activity; everybody wants to participate."

The comments of participated students are positive and one student described liked the game and describe it by saying "It's fun; it's the first time we play such game. They really enjoyed doing it and they were motivated to learn and memorize new vocabulary by games. The look of enjoyment is shown on the faces of the students and it indicates the need of students to have the opportunity to play games as they provide an active and supportive environment for them in the classroom.

Halliwell (1992: p.40) has summarized the benefits of meaningful games as follows: "They exploit and develop the capacity for interaction and talk, the capacity for indirect learning, the capacity for creative use of language resources, and the capacity for playing and fun" .. The games and activities used here have apparently provided the students with chances to examine the words closely, as well as enhancing their motivation to learn.

5. Concluding Remarks

This research suggests that using games to practice vocabulary improves learners' ability to memorize the words effectively. Games provide comprehensible input while learners interact in the group and allowing students to clarify the meanings of the words. This strategy also enhanced students' motivation to learn new vocabulary of scientific English.

The strategy also allows the students to interact effectively with peers, which is also used as student-centered method. The games also provided a challenge, where they need their concentration to get the tasks done which strengthen students' mental work. Such activities were also new to students' experience and they think carefully to get the right answers.

However, after using games to teach vocabulary, it can be said that teachers can vary their methods of teaching. Thus, it is recommended that teachers should try using vocabulary games as well as the drilling method. It is also recommend that teachers should consider recycling words regularly through using of drills as well as games. The results may be disseminated of this research for secondary school teachers in general and language teachers in particular to benefit of this strategy in teaching new vocabulary strategy.

According to the results of this action research, it is suggested that vocabulary games can be used successfully in the schools at any levels.

To conclude, it is found that using games to practice vocabulary enhances students' ability to memorize words; encourages student interaction; and enhances their motivation.

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Appendix

Student Survey

Name-------------------- Class------------------ Date----------

1. Do you find memorizing new vocabularies difficult? Yes No

2. Which language skill you do find more difficult when learning new vocabularies;
    a) listening
    b) reading

3. Tick the way that may help you to memorize new vocabularies:
    a) Real things
    b) Flash cards
    c) Pictures
    d) Games
    e) Giving examples including the new words
    f) Listen to pronunciation of a native speaker
    g) Using dictionary
    h) Acting out the new vocabularies in conversation