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Using games in vocabulary teaching

The article describes the role of games in the process of foreign language teaching. Using games in teaching vocabulary skills develops habits and skills of dialogue speech, promotes students' speaking initiatives and enhances the natural communicative orientation of the lesson. The authors suppose that while playing games students involuntarily memorize new lexical and grammar material. Thus using games in foreign language teaching is one of the most effective ways that provide students with speaking opportunities and at the same time, motivate them.

Key words: word association, vocabulary games, vocabulary activity, motivate, teaching the vocabulary, encourage, vocabulary presentation, provide vocabulary practice, facilitate language practice, amusing experience.

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. Vocabulary is the total number of words in a language. Vocabulary is an important part to master English well. There are essential steps of learning vocabulary (Hatch and Brown) [1]:

- Having source for encountering new words;
- Getting a clear image for the form of new words;
- Learning the meaning of new words;
- Making a strong memory connection between the form and the meaning of the words.

To increase the vocabulary we need media to be used. One of them is game. The definition of game is an activity that you do to have some fun. Games can make the students more focus in learning, because they do not feel that they are forced to learn. Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely. They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinion and feelings. They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson. Games can be media that will give many advantages for teacher and the students as well. The use of games attract the student to learn English because it is fun and make them want to have experiment, discover and interact with their environment. Some experts have also figured out characteristics of games that make vocabulary learning more effectively. Lee (1996) 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 holds that games are highly appreciated due to their amusement and interest. Teachers can use games to help their students practice more their skills of communication. Besides, Uberman also states the helpful role of games in vocabulary teaching after quoting and analyzing different opinions of experts. And also, Uberman observed the interest of her students in learning through games. She believes that games are a way to help students not only enjoy and amuse with the language they learn, but also practice it incidentally. To be short, games can be considered useful and effective tools that may be applied in vocabulary classes. The use of games in teaching vocabulary is a way to make the lessons more interesting, enjoyable and effective [1].

Vocabulary acquisition is increasingly viewed as crucial to language acquisition. However, there is much disagreement as to the effectiveness of different approaches for presenting vocabulary items. Moreover, learning vocabulary is often perceived as a tedious and laborious process.

In the article we would like to present some ways of using games in vocabulary teaching. There are numerous techniques concerned with vocabulary presentation. However, there are a few things that have to be remembered irrespective of the way new lexical items are presented. If teachers want students to remember new vocabulary better, it needs to be learnt in context, practiced, and then revised to prevent students from forgetting. Teachers must make sure students have understood the new words, which will be remembered better if introduced in a «memorable way» [2]. Bearing all this in mind, teachers have to remem-

ber to employ a variety of techniques for new vocabulary presentation and revision. We believe that one of the effective ways of vocabulary presentation is- using games.

Games are an important part of a teacher's repertoire. The purpose of games in the learning process is to reinforce what has already been taught. During the game, learners are engaged in an enjoyable and challenging activity with a clear goal. Often, students are so involved in playing the games that they do not realize they are practicing language. So games can provide vocabulary practice. Vocabulary games facilitate initial practice and periodic revision of vocabulary in an enjoyable context, thus making classroom vocabulary study an amusing and satisfying experience for teacher and student at the same time. Some games are played with the whole class, often with the students divided into two teams, while others can be played in pairs or small groups.

Many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value W.R.Lee holds that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms [3]. He also says that games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. There are many advantages of using games. «Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely» [4]. They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings. Games also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson [5].

Games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency. If not for any of these reasons, they should be used just because they help students see beauty in a foreign language and not just problems that at times seem overwhelming.

Teachers should be very careful about choosing games if they want to make them profitable for the learning process. If you want the games to bring desired results you must be sure that they correspond to the student's level, or age, or to the material that is to be introduced or practiced. Games become difficult when the task or the topic is unsuitable or outside the student's experience.

One of the factors influencing the choice of a game is its length and the time, necessary for its completion. Many games have a time limit, but according to Siek-Piskozub, the teacher can either allocate more or less time depending on the students' level, the number of people in a group, or the knowledge of the rules of a game etc. (1994:43). Some teachers suggest that games be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. At different stages of the lesson, the teacher's aims connected with a game may vary:

1. Presentation. Provide a good model making its meaning clear;
2. Controlled practice. Elicit good imitation of new language and appropriate responses;
3. Communicative practice. Give students a chance to use the language [6].

After the teacher chooses what items to teach, Haycraft suggests following certain guidelines. These include teaching the vocabulary «in spoken form first» to prevent students from pronouncing the words in the form they are written, placing the new items in context, and revising them. A number of techniques can be adopted to present new vocabulary items. The presentation of new vocabulary is classified according to verbal and visual techniques according to Gairn's and Redman's classification. Among visual techniques are flashcards, photographs and pictures, wall charts, blackboard drawings, word pictures, realia, mime, and gesture. Students can label pictures or objects or perform an action. Verbal techniques consist of using illustrative situations, descriptions, synonyms and antonyms, scales, and using various forms of definition: definition by demonstration (visual definition), definition by abstraction, contextual definitions, and definition by translation [7].

Now let us look at what games the teacher may exploit while working with words.

1. *Word association* requires students to name all the words they know associated with any lexical category. One student says a word from the category, then the next student must immediately say another word from the category. The next student continues with another word and so on around the class. For the category *health*, for example, the game might begin this way:

Student 1: illness

Student 2: catch a cold

Student 3: sneeze

Student 4: cough

Student 5: remedy

Anyone who can't think of a word immediately has to drop out of the game.

2. *Memory game* begins with one student saying a sentence and the next student in turn adds another word or phrase to the sentence, repeating what has gone before in the same order, for example,

Student 1: I went to the library.

Student 2: I went to the library and took some books.

Student 3: I went to the library and took some books and began writing my course paper.

and so on. Anyone who cannot add to the list or makes a mistake in ordering the words must drop out of the game. The last player remaining is the winner. This game may be exploited while working with words related to any topic.

3. *Miming* can be used as a guessing game. This wordless activity leads the students to speak quite naturally. Someone mimes an action and the others try to guess what it is. This kind of guessing game can provide further practice of a wider variety of lexical and grammatical units, such as those related to occupations. One student chooses an animal and mimes a typical action that it involves. The others try to guess the animal by asking either about the action or the animal, for example, *Can it fly?., Does it crawl?., Is it a wild animal?., Is it a domestic animal?.* The student miming provides only nonverbal clues to help the rest of the class guess what the animal is.

4. *Crime and punishment.* The class is divided into two teams. The students of the first team write on a sheet of paper what «crime» was committed. e.g. *«The window was broken. The bag was stolen».* The other team writes what punishment to be followed for it. e.g. *He must be taken to prison.* Then all the crimes and punishments will be read.

5. *Guess the tool game* provides a good opportunity to develop students' skills in defining words and paraphrasing. For this game the teacher puts the students in pairs, facing each other, and gives a card with two words written on it to each student and asks them not to show each other their cards. The two words written on the cards are a tool and a related occupation, for example, *saw and carpenter, blackboard and teacher.* One at a time, each student describes the tool without saying its name. The other student has to guess the tool and name an occupation that uses the tool, for example,

Student 1: It is used for painting windows and doors.

Student 2: It is a paintbrush. A decorator uses a paintbrush.

6. *Suggestion chain* involves reviewing both leisure activities vocabulary and ways to make suggestions. For this game students first make an individual list of leisure activities. Then using their lists, one student begins by suggesting something to do in the evening or next weekend, for example, *Let's go to the disco.*

The next student has to disagree and, using another way of making a suggestion, suggest a different activity, for example:

Student 1: Let's go to the disco!

Student 2: No, not the disco.

What about going to the park?

Student 3: We could go to the theatre.

Student 4: No, not the theatre. Why don't we visit Saule?

Students continue the game until they have used all their leisure activities. Another way to end this game and have a winner is to eliminate the student who repeats a leisure activity that was suggested before or uses the wrong verb form in the suggestion.

7. *Team game.* For this game the teacher has to prepare cards with the names of different countries. The students are divided into two teams. Then the teacher takes any card and reads out the country. The first team must name the language of this country (or nationality), the second team — the capital (or state symbols) of this country. Then the teams exchange their tasks.

8. *Topic discussion.* The students of the group choose a topic for a discussion (cinema, ecology, education). Then the group is divided into two teams. The students of each team have to give sentences on the topic one by one using the emphatic construction «*it is that*». The winner is the team that gives the last sentence on the topic. Time is limited.

9. *Exaggeration game* gives students the opportunity to practice strong adjectives, such as enormous, delicious, fascinating, horrible, marvelous, astonished, and furious, along with intensifying adverbs, such as extremely, quite, rather, really and absolutely by answering questions. Beforehand the teacher must prepare cards, each with a question, which may be tag (Americans are punctual, aren't they?), (Wasn't she furious when she heard the news?), or yes/no (Are you patriotic?). The game begins with the cards face down on the table. The teacher calls on someone to pick a card and read out the question. Then that person calls out the name of another student, who has to answer the question using an appropriate strong adjective, for example,

Student 1: They serve nice dishes in that restaurant, don't they? Laura!

Student 2 (Laura): Nice? The food is absolutely delicious there!

The second student now picks a different card, reads out the question, and names another student to answer it, and the game continues. Any student who does not use a strong adjective and/ or intensifying adverb while answering is eliminated. It is best to play this game after the students have matched common, weak adjectives with their stronger synonyms.

10. *The most interesting story.* The students are divided into two teams. Each team is given a task to make up a story on a certain topic. («*In the zoo*», «*Sport games*», «*A trip to the country*», «*At the University library*»). The winner is the team that makes up the most interesting story with few mistakes.

The games included in this article are by no means an exhaustive selection. We have only tried to present some nuggets from our teaching for others to try out in their classes. The games are intended to be integrated into the general language syllabus of any course book and can be an important and enjoyable way of practicing vocabulary for learners. If the examples we've provided do not allow teachers to exploit a particular game in other teaching situations, they may need to adapt it to the proficiency level of their classes by changing the target lexis. Teachers may also modify any game to suit different teaching environments.

In EFL contexts, 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

In conclusion we would like to note that games are effective activities as a technique for vocabulary revision. Students also prefer games and puzzles to other activities. Games motivate and entertain students but also help them learn in a way which aids the retention and retrieval of the material. Recently, using games has become a popular technique exercised by many educators in the classrooms and recommended by methodologists. Many sources, including the ones quoted in this article, list the advantages of the use of games in foreign language classrooms. Though the main objectives of the games are to acquaint students with new words or phrases and help them consolidate lexical items, they also help develop the students' communicative competence.

Our observations testify that those students who practice vocabulary game activities feel more motivated and interested in what they are doing. The fun and relaxed atmosphere accompanying the activity during the game facilitate students' learning. All of the learners expressed their wish to learn vocabulary effectively in more interesting ways than the traditional ways that they knew. So, our goal was to define the efficiency of the use of vocabulary games in developing students' communicative skill in English. The result of our research work shows that learners were interested in games on the whole and preferred mostly joint group games, they did their best to become winners. Students collaborated quite actively in games that required group work, even the shy students. They said that they liked the relaxed atmosphere, the competitiveness and the motivation that games brought to the classroom. EFL students in our classes are gradually making progress in vocabulary and the games help them memorize new words and expressions that are used by them in the games. The classroom atmosphere was exciting as our EFL students discussed and worked together. Besides, our students' communicative skills and practice showed that the games were very useful for enriching their vocabulary level because they played with each other, interacted and as a result they cooperated in developing their language skills and could learn a lot from their classmates. Using games in the classroom sometimes fails due to the lack of cooperation among members of the class. Games require all students' involvement; therefore, it is very important that students have a cooperative attitude.

Regarding the effectiveness of games, we can say that our students seemed to learn new vocabulary more quickly and retain it better when it was applied in a relaxed and comfortable environment such as while playing games. Most students agreed that their use of vocabulary was becoming better since they actively joined games and involved in cooperative learning. Although Games are effective in cooperative learning new words, they cannot be successful if the teacher does not explain the tasks and roles of students clearly in playing games.

Games should be an integral part of a lesson, providing the possibility of intensive practice while at the same time immensely enjoyable for both students and teachers. And we would like to recommend the wide use of games for enhancing students' vocabulary knowledge and skills as a successful way of language competence formation.

References

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Лексиканы оқытуда ойын түрлерін қолдану

Мақалада ағылшын тілінде лексиканы үйрету, оқыту кезінде, сөздік қорды байыту мақсатында ойын түрлерін қолданудың маңызы жайында айтылды. Сонымен қатар лексикалық дағдыларды қалыптастыру үшін студенттердің белсенділігін арттыратын, қызығушылығын тудыратын ойын түрлері берілген.

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Использование игр в обучении лексике

В статье рассмотрена роль учебных игр в процессе изучения английского языка. Проанализированы игровые приемы в обучении лексике, которая формирует навыки и умения диалогической речи, способствует речевой инициативе студентов и усиливает естественно-коммуникативную направленность урока. Авторами сделаны выводы, что в условиях игры осуществляется в значительной мере произвольное запоминание нового лексического и грамматического материала, развивается и совершенствуется речемыслительная деятельность.