

The Effectiveness of the Employment of Games to Develop English Vocabulary for the 3rd Grade Students at Tan Lap Primary School, Thai Nguyen City

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Abstract: *English plays a very important role in the current globalization era. Therefore, the education system of our country places great emphasis on teaching English to students. However, learning English is a challenging task for students in Vietnam. Local primary school students are still weak in all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Especially, students in Tan Lap, are very shy to speak English in class due to many different reasons such as shyness, reticence, fear of laughter when they say the wrong thing; Due to the large class sizes, teachers have little time to practice skills for each student. Therefore, a good organization of speaking practice will help overcome these limitations. Therefore, finding an appropriate, interesting, and effective way to learn English is a problem for teachers in general and Tan Lap school in particular. This research is going to practice on techniques of using games in teaching English vocabulary for primary school students. Through finding the answers to the research questions, the researcher can find out the effectiveness of using game techniques in teaching English vocabulary for primary school students. Its results are hoping to be a helpful reference for future research, as well as for teachers who desire to help students in studying English.*

Keywords: *Language Games, Vocabulary, Teaching, Action Research*

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I. Rationale

Nowadays, as learning English is no longer new and unfamiliar to students, this subject has received the attention of parents and students. English is also a subject for students to love, explore, compare the differences between languages, learn about the culture, people, socio-economics of the country they are studying. However, for primary school students, especially those who start to come into contact with English like 3rd graders, teaching Vietnamese is already difficult, teaching English is even more challenging. On the first day of class, the teacher asked the students to keep quiet or answer in a low voice. With enthusiasm, teachers overcome difficulties and inspire students. Gradually, the subject of English began to seep into each student. For students at primary schools, teaching and learning English should come from the children's interests, concerns, and personal experiences. The students at Tan Lap Primary School in Thai Nguyen Province share the same nature; they have not been able to grasp a language systematically and analyze a language consciously, and one of their common characteristics is curiosity. The way of teaching with nothing new and interesting will make students bored; therefore, the teacher needs something different to make students interested, and interesting activities which can motivate them. Thus, to motivate them, the teacher needs something new that can stimulate their curiosity, and one of the best methods to teach English to students at this age is through interactive activities. Games as interactive activities are used to avoid boredom and increase enjoyment in the classroom. Both students and teachers will benefit from including games during class time.

During the monitoring of English lessons at Tan Lap Primary School, it has been observed that there exists a significant lack of vocabulary in English in the students. The lack of vocabulary is characterized by some signs that students show in the classroom. On most occasions when students are asked about the name of an item in the target language, they tend to use their mother tongue because of a lack of knowledge of the word in the foreign language; or they simply stay silent because they do not know or do not remember the word in English. Another perceived aspect is that students do not discriminate words correctly as they do not know their meanings and many times they get confused with words that have a similar spelling or sound; this deficiency in the discrimination of words makes the students use wrong words which makes the sense of the message distorted. Also, the students have some difficulties when recognizing objects around them, elements or topics that include simple vocabulary such as the parts of the body, numbers, the alphabet, school supplies, among others. Additionally, what is most noticeable is that students cannot answer questions, showing insecurity at the

time of responding, and this is because they are real beginners as they have heard little English during their learning experience.

Although language structure is considered “the skeleton of the language,” it agreed that vocabulary is “the vital organs and flesh” (Harmer, 1991). Vocabulary is the basic part and a key element to learning any language, in other words, vocabulary learning plays a major role in English language learners’ success. On another aspect, learning English vocabulary is not easy especially for beginners because sometimes they should find the meaning of difficult words when they found them. It might be difficult for beginners because they have to memorize unfamiliar words and their spelling (Nguyen & Khuat, 2003). As specialists in the teaching of a foreign language, we have the responsibility for contributing to the significant learning of vocabulary, not just as knowledge but as something that must be present in students’ real life. That goal can be achieved through different activities that include songs, craft activities, drills, games, and others. However, from all these, we consider that a technique that can help students learn in a fun and active way is through language games because they sustain enjoyment and interest in learning and encourage using the language fearlessly and creatively.

Theoretically, many linguists across the world have investigated the use of games in teaching vocabulary. The previous studies illustrated in the report (Decarrico, 2001), vocabulary should not be learned separately or by memorization without understanding. This is why teaching English in a fun and interesting way might be appropriate for teaching beginners, including using games. Furthermore, another study focused on the impact of using interactive games on the mode of learning (Foreman et al., 2004). Games are helpful for teachers in creating a meaningful language context. The use of games as a learning tool is more effective to catch students’ attention compared to using traditional media such as textbooks (Wood, 2001). All of the aforementioned reasons have paved the way for the researcher to carry out a study: “The Effectiveness of the Employment of Games to Develop English Vocabulary for the 3rd Grade Students at Tan Lap Primary School, Thai Nguyen City, Thai Nguyen Province”.

II. Method Of The Research

The main method of the research is action research. The term “action research” refers to two dimensions of activity: the word “research” refers to a systematic approach to carrying out investigations and collecting information that is designed to illuminate an issue or problem and to improve classroom practice, meanwhile the word “action” refers to taking practical action to resolve classroom problems (Richards, 2005). Therefore, action research achieves both action (change or improve) and research (understanding).

According to Cohen et al. (2007), action research is “small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention”. Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988) identify three characteristics of action research, which are “carried out by practitioners”, “collaborative” and “aimed at changing things”.

III. Findings

3.1. Findings from tests

Tests were considered as one of the most effective ways to judge pupils’ achievement. The two normally selected tests that pupils were invited to join were the pre-test and the post-test. The following sections will give more details of these tests.

3.1.1 Pre-test results

At the first step of the investigation, the pre-test was used to assess pupils’ level in retaining English vocabulary. Tests were designed following the matrix regulated in the Circular No.03/VBHN-BGDĐT by the Ministry of Education and Training. According to the Circular, there were four levels used to evaluate pupils’ knowledge and skills. At level 1, pupils needed to remember the words’ meaning and pronunciation. Level 2 asked pupils to understand the vocabulary and applied them in making simple sentences. Pupils reached Level 3 when they knew how to apply the vocabulary in conversations. The highest level was Level 4 in which pupils knew how to apply the vocabulary to solve reading comprehensive tasks such as “read and answer questions”, “read and complete”. At this stage, the pupils were subdivided into 4 groups which were classified by the marks they got. Figure 1 describes the results of the pre-test from the pupils. At the first step of the investigation, the pre-test was used to assess pupils’ level in retaining English vocabulary. Tests were designed following the matrix regulated in the Circular While pupils getting mark 9-10 accounted for 85 per cent, those getting marks

7-8 made up only 15 per cent. Noticeably, no pupils participated in the pre-test was given mark 5-6 or less than mark 5. Figure 1 described the results of the pre-test from the pupils.

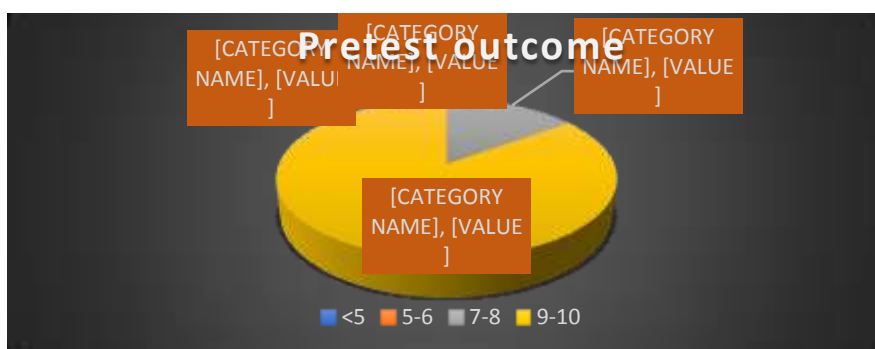


Figure 1: Pre-test outcome

3.1.2. Post-test results

At the end of the project, a final achievement test (post-test) was delivered to all pupils. The results showed a dramatic positive change in the pupils' performance. Figure 2 shows pupils' results in post-test.

It could be demonstrated from Figure 2 that there was a significant increase in the number of pupils getting high marks. As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the percentage of scores 7 and 8 went up significantly and remained the highest figure in the chart, at 7%. The figure for scores 9 and 10 also rose strongly to 93% which indicated a remarkable development in the pupils' scores. The improvement of the pupils was found by the expansion of the number of pupils who achieved high scores.

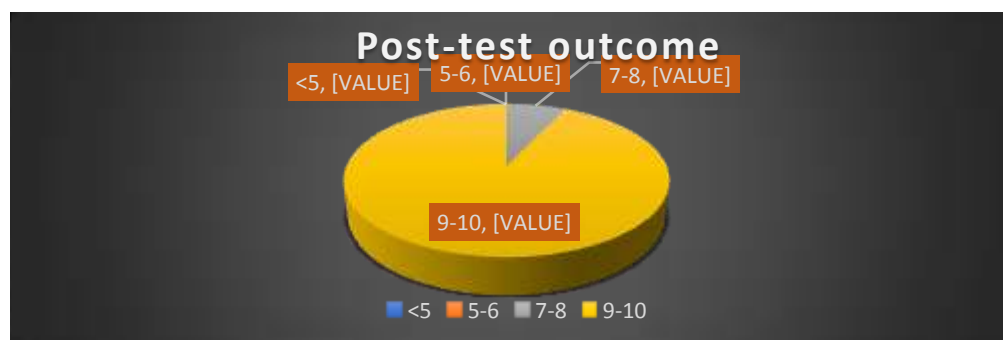


Figure 2: Post-test outcome

3.1.3. Differences in pupils' vocabulary use before and after using language games in teaching vocabulary

Table 1: The overall descriptive data of the tests

Grade	<5	5-6	7-8	9-10
Pretest	0%	0%	15%	85%
Post-test	0%	0%	7%	93%

As observed in the table, the rate of good scores is significantly higher than that of the pre-test. In the pre-test, 85 % of pupils got 9, 10, yet 93 % of them did well in the post-test. The lower score (7-8) also decreased from 15% down to 7 %. Based on this evidence, the conclusion could be drawn that most pupils' vocabulary retention has been improved considerably by using games in the classroom.

In shorts, there was a considerable improvement in the scores of the pupils at Tan Lap Primary School. It can be interpreted from the results that language games played an important part in helping pupils to learn vocabulary. They could remember vocabulary better and could use them more appropriately.

3.2. Findings from interviews

3.2.1. Interviews with teachers

The interview was conducted to know the responses of teachers towards the use of language games in improving pupils' mastering of vocabulary. Hence, seven questions related to the use of language games in enhancing pupils' vocabulary intention were asked by the researcher.

3.2.1.1. Teachers' frequency of using games in teaching English

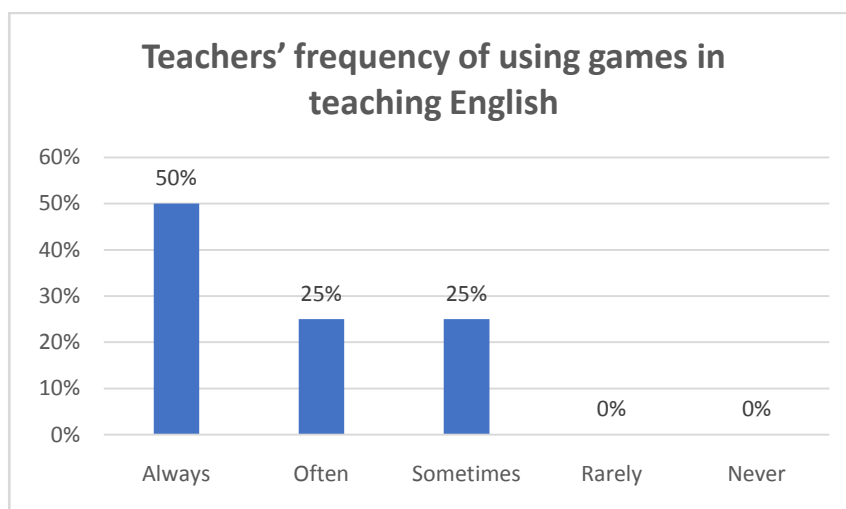


Figure 3: Teachers' frequency of using games in teaching English (Question 1)

It can be seen that 100% of teachers use games in teaching English. There were two teacher which take up 50% said that they always used games to teach pupils. The teachers said that the games were interesting to the elementary pupils. That was the reason why they love teaching English with the use of games. There was one teacher (25%) stating that they often used games in the lesson because the pupils were more excited in learning. One teacher sometimes used games because she said that games were so interesting and easy to play, furthermore pupils paid more attention to the lesson with the use of games, but she said that "pupils should do a lot of exercises instead."

3.2.1.2 Teachers' attitudes towards the effectiveness of games.

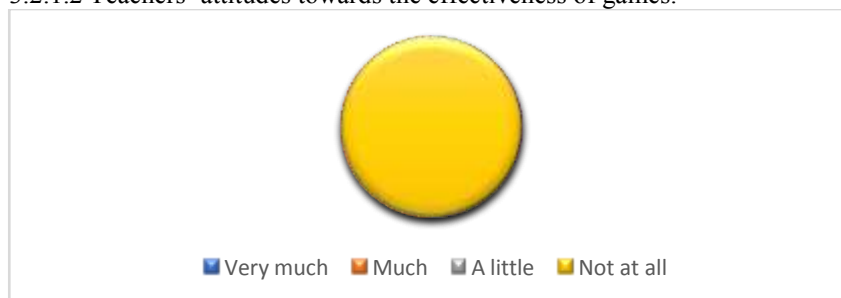


Figure 4: Teachers' attitudes towards the effectiveness of games. (Question 2)

It can be seen from the chart that 100% thought that using games could enhance pupils' vocabulary. They said that since they used games, the atmosphere of the class have been changed. Pupils like learning English more, they could remember vocabulary better.

3.1.2.4. The difficulties the teacher had while designing a lesson with the use of games.

The first disadvantages in teaching vocabulary with the use of games is that although in the textbook, there are many types of games, 2 teachers complained that this take a lot of time to introduce the requirements of the task, so they did not have enough time for other tasks.

An other disadvantages of this method comes from the sources. The teacher said that there were a lot of games in the textbook but sometimes they were too familiar with those so they wanted something different. Hence, the teachers always tried to find out suitable sources from the Internet, television or other books...

3.1.2.5. The sources of games

The sources of games	Number of teacher	Percentage (%)
From VCD, CD	0	0
From textbook	3	75%
From the radio/ TV	0	0
Other sources	1	25%

Table 2: The sources of games (Question 4)

Answering the 4th questions in the interview for teachers, none of teachers used games form the CD, VCD or from the radio/ TV. Three teachers (75%) used games from textbook. They find it easy to design games which focuses on the task, so the lesson is very inetesting.

3.3.2.5. The tasks teachers design to teach pupils with the use of games (Question 5)

The last question is the most important in the interview for teachers because it helps them to find out the best way to teach vocabulary for pupils. Filling in the blanks with mising words, choose the words that are different from the others are the mó t common tasks which they often do.

In short, using games has a lot of advantages and the teachers always try to find out the most effective ways to teach vocabulary for their pupils.

3.2. **Questionnaire for pupils**

3.2.1. Pupils' attitude towards learning vocabulary with the use of games

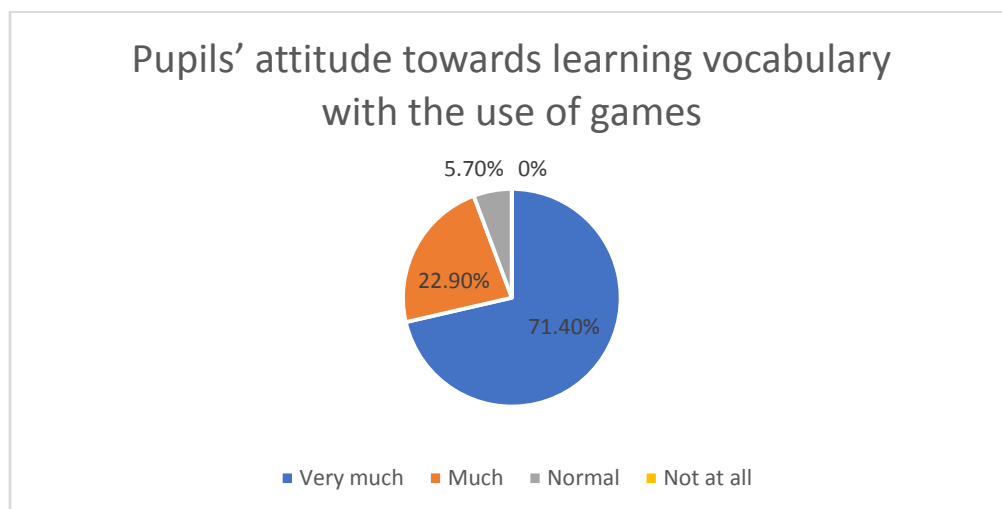


Figure 5. Pupils' attitude towards learning vocabulary with the use of games

It can be seen form the table that 94,3% of the pupils reported that they liked learning English with games. 25 of 35 that take up 71,4% of pupils said that they loved the lesson with the use of games very much. 8 of 35 pupils taking up 22,9% said that games helped them improve vocabulary and they like them. 2 of the respondents felt that they had no idea about games. They liked the other tasks in the Textbook.

3.2.2. The improvement of pupils after they had been taught with the use of games.

Question 3	Number of pupils	Percentage (%)
Very much	26	74.3%
Much	8	22.8%
Not much	1	2.9%
Very little	0	0%
Not at all	0	0%

Table 3. The improvement of pupils after they had been taught with the use of games

This results indicates that games have great influence on pupils learning vocabulary. This is proved that 100% of the respondents saud that their vocabulary is better than before. 26 pupils (74.3%) stated that their vocabulary was improved very much and 8 pupils (22.8%) made much progress. Only 1 pupils which take up (2.9%) showed that his/her vocabulary was enhanced but not much.

3.2.3. Pupils' favourite tasks in the lesson with the use of games

Content	Very much	Much	A little	Not at all
Filing the blanks with correct words	48%	35%	15%	2%
Choosing the correct answer				
Choose the words that are different from the others	45%	34%	18%	3%
Ticking true of false items	40%	30%	25%	5%

Matching	42%	33%	21%	4%
Mistake correction	35%	30%	25%	10%

Table 4: Pupils' favourite tasks in the lesson with the use of games

It can be seen that from the table that Filing the blanks with correct words and Choose the words that are different from the others attract pupils' interest greatly. 97% of the pupils were interested in the task. When being asked for the reason, they said that all the tasks were easy to do and they often get good marks. Mistake correction seems to be difficult for them. They said that they had a headache after doing the task and they do not remember the words they learnt before.

3.4. Summary

Based on the results from data instruments of survey questionnaires, pre-test and post-test scores, and interview, there was evidence indicating that the application of games positively influenced pupils' level of motivation in learning vocabulary. In other words, the results suggested that pupils were highly motivated to learn their essential vocabulary by the application of playing games. In addition, according to the results, games were positively evaluated by the pupils in all aspects according to attention, relevance, satisfaction and confidence.

IV. Conclusion

One of the best and most effective ways to learn English is through playing games, learning while playing, which is not only entertaining but will help you have moments to recharge yourself, and at the same time know more naturally acquired knowledge.

Teaching and learning of language consist of its skills and aspects. Mastery of vocabulary is inevitable for the successful learning of language. For the students, they should motivate themselves to learn the essential vocabulary. For the teacher, the vocabulary teaching should be conducted by the teacher in creative, variant, and interesting methods. So, the students feel enjoyed joining the vocabulary learning process.

Although language games proved to be a useful way to enhance students' motivation in learning vocabulary, this application also had some limitations. The first limitation is derived from the students being unclear of instructions that they were confused and struggled when taking part in the games. Consequently, some of them were observed to not keep up with the teaching pace. Another drawback of this action is the lack of cooperation among students since individuals' achievement and competition were emphasized. Although the researcher has devoted herself to professionally conducting this study, it is unavoidable that she encounters some difficulties in the process of implementation, which resulted in the research having the following limitations

Having concluded the result of the research, the writer would like to propose some recommendations that hopefully will be useful for students and other English teachers. Firstly, the application of online games cannot be successful if the teacher does not explain the tasks and roles of students clearly in playing games. It is important to make students understand the games' rules, how the games went and what procedures they had to follow. Consequently, when a correct answer is shown, instead of skipping and moving to the next questions, the teacher should explain and give details about the reasons for choosing that answer. Besides, using online games in the classroom sometimes fails due to the lack of cooperation among members of the class. Since the game concerns winning and losing, instructors need to inform them of the real purpose of gaming activities. What they are supposed to gain more than competition and enjoyment are learning something new such as vocabulary knowledge. In a further study, the researcher hopes to figure out the impacts of other kinds of online games such as surveys and puzzles as well as the influences of group work as a team player in comparison with individual one which was employed in this study.

Teaching children to learn is a process that requires perseverance, but teaching children to learn English correctly and correctly is even more difficult. Therefore, with a teaching program with exciting and exciting games and activities at Tan Lap primary school, parents can be assured of the quality of the program, along with a team of enthusiastic and dedicated teachers who will create build a solid foundation of English for children from the very beginning.