



LET'S GAMIFY OUR CLASSES! IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY WITH GAME-BASED TEACHING STRATEGY'S

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted a thematic-analysis approach to investigate how eleven experienced English teachers from three schools in Libya are thinking about game-based vocabulary teaching. Interviewing twelve teachers using WhatsApp due to face-to-face communication restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic shows that the game/fun-based teaching improve students vocabulary. Three core themes have emerged: The first theme was the effects of fun/game-based strategy, with two sub-themes: communication factors and students' skills. The second generated theme was the advantages of the game for teaching vocabulary. The third theme which was captured from teachers experiences to help students memorizing new words was teachers' creative way of teaching vocabulary with two subthemes, including (1) teachers' way of presenting the game and (2) teachers' way of practising vocabulary. This study shows that teachers apply a variety of techniques expected to optimize vocabulary learning in the classroom

1. Introduction

The lack of vocabulary for Libyan young English learners despite spending years learning English is discussed by (Diaab 2016; Safaa, 2021), which opens teaching innovatively. As the English language has become accepted as an international language in Libya, English lessons are provided for Libyan students as primary education. The English program in Libya aims to empower students' speaking, reading, and understanding English proficiency to develop their interest in learning English while improving their knowledge and having access to foreign cultures (Aldabbus, 2008). However, local research results show that the goals were not yet reached among Libyans and students, and success in English is still disappointing (Alshibany, 2017; Maqbool, 2018). Similarly, A Al-Jasir (2020) reported that non-native English learners could improve their vocabulary using paper-based vocabulary teaching strategies. This unsatisfactory performance could be that Libyan students who learn the English language are not given opportunities for interaction and participation in the classroom; the chance to work collaboratively. The main challenge for English teachers is to find the best coping strategy improving students' interactions in English with a high level of vocabulary proficiency. Despite the efficiency of vocabulary games supported in various studies, e.g., (Bytheway, 2014; Rahman & Angraeni, 2020; Saputra, 2018; Yang et al., 2020), these are the effectiveness of these findings techniques needs more investigation to establish as vocabulary is an essential part of foreign language learning and also central to language teaching. Therefore, the present study aimed to answer these two essential questions: (1) What is the advantage of applying game-based strategies to teach vocabulary? (2) What is a creative way teachers use to teach vocabulary teachers?

2. Literature Review

Teaching English to young learners has always been inspired by many academics and debates in non-native English speakers' countries. Among them, Libya keeps focusing on improving the English education system despite its many fundamental changes. A strong relationship between language games-based approach and creating an enjoyable learning environment has been reported in a Libyan study (Aldabbus, 2008). The language games-based approach enhances the teacher-student interaction. The effect of using media for students' vocabulary mastery was reported to be effective. The result of a quasi-experimental among two groups (an experimental and a control group) supported students' responses toward the game as a vocabulary learning tool (c & Angraeni, 2020). Applying visual techniques to teach new vocabulary in Libyan schools helps the teachers and students equally explore an original teaching method and learn the new vocabulary of the English language.

Using classroom observation and pre-and post-test methods, a researcher shows that teachers confirmed that using children's picture books tactic increased the students' skills to learn and use new vocabularies. They found difficulty learning and pronouncing it before using the picture book technique (Safaa, 2021). Vocabulary learning is constantly exploring by researchers to identify how to develop the best strategy for improving vocabulary. One of the effective

vocabulary learning methods is online-based game vocabulary instruction. Game-based and online role-playing vocabulary learning promotes imagination, reduces anxiety, strengthens engagement, increases motivation, and rewards curiosity (Bytheway, 2014). The game-based teaching style could be applied in learning processes both in group and individual practising. Many English learners use games as an informal learning technique. Learners and teachers value vocabulary learning opportunities in informal learning settings, such as media (news, books, etc.). But the use of passive media is decreasing, and interactive media (digital games) is increasing. A game-based strategy such as game-based 3D virtual language learning environments (Lan et al., 2018); audio-virtual games (Susnawati & A.A.I.N., 2020); video games (Saputra, 2018); online vocabulary games (Tsai & Tsai, 2018; Yip & Kwan, 2006) are initiated to enhance learners' motivation to boost their English learning process. Students reported that game-based lessons were more entertaining, easy to catch, engaging, interactive, and more effective.

Many scholars provide evidence of how significant it is integrating game-based learning into education since it provides good opportunities for students to stimulating real-world situations, as well as helping them to enjoy engaging the learning procedure at the same time and empower them to have a better understanding of the nature of the content. Game-based learning has been applied and conducted for primary to university levels in language learning. Some researchers have designed and integrated game-based learning in language classrooms to explore how digital games and gaming strategies could facilitate language performance, motivation, engagement, attitudes, or perceptions (Abrams & Walsh, 2014; Bytheway, 2014; Lin et al., 2020). The principal and most frequently used games for language learning are immersive games and tutorial games, which provide narrative role-playing experiences and teaching guides to help learners acquire language, typically vocabulary (Hung et al., 2018), and several other specific skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. Researchers have examined the significance of game-based strategies on students learning (Purgina et al., 2020). Game-based teaching offers students' opportunities for English grammar and vocabulary improvement. A well-designed game should offer players timely, correct feedback and help them learn with a reasonable level of cognitive learning (Lin et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

Due to the breakout coronavirus pandemic and the simplicity of digital communications, the interview has been done online through the WhatsApp application. The participant gave a suitable time to answer and share their experience teaching English as a second language of different stages for learners. Twelve teachers from three different schools of the researcher hometown in Alkufrah city to be part of his study as a research paper for Benghazi University at Faculty of Art and Science. A structured interview using instant messaging, namely WhatsApp, with those teachers who agreed to participate in the research from three schools of Alkufrah city. A group of 12 teachers aged 30-40 with an average of five years of teaching experience have been interviewed. Thematic analysis was applied using ATLAS.ti software version 7.0.15 to translate teachers' responses into breakdown data and coding explicitly. Later codes obtained from the highlighted quotations and those causally related indicators were categorized under the list of themes and subthemes following the guidance provided by (Boyatzis 1998).

For thematic analysis procedures, first, the teachers' respondents were reviewed, explored and highlighted., all answers have been categorized in a general theme and coding. Those codes are then placed into categories driven by the teachers' responses, labelled and exemplified in Figure 1 and Table 1. Those highlighted parts from interviewees' quotations responses were encoded to explicit codes. Generated code then categorized into broader patterns of meaning under succinct themes relevant to answering the research question. After reviewing themes, checking the themes with codes under them to determine that they tell a convincing story that answers the research question, an informative name for each theme was chosen. Finally, the narrative analysis and extracted data, weaving together to contextualize with existing literature.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The teacher's responses have been categorized into five subthemes under three themes to answer the research questions. Two of them, including: (1) Communication factors and (2) Students' skills, were identified under the theme of which help researcher to answer the research question one. The second generated theme from teachers' answers was the advantages of the game for teaching vocabulary. The third was captured from teachers' experiences to help students memorize new words, named Teachers' creative way of teaching vocabulary with two subthemes including (1) Teachers' way of presenting the game, and (2) Teachers' way of practicing vocabulary. The details are explained, respectively.

Table 1: Impact of Game

1. Impact of game-based (fun/-based) strategy of teaching on improving students' vocabulary	
Communication factors	Bring people together. Improve communication skills. Overcome shyness of speaking. Presence of students Brainpower
Students' personal skills	Help to memorize words. Improves concentration. Use most of their senses
2. Advantages of the game for teaching vocabulary	
Encouraging	
Facilitate vocabulary learning.	
Interactivity	
It is accessible.	
It is easy.	
It is fun.	
Students are happy	
3: Teachers' creative way of teaching vocabulary	
Teachers' way of presenting the game	Role-playing game Team group Tongue twist Using concrete tools Using technology Vocabularies game Guessing by writing a sentence Make a simple example
Teachers' way of practicing	Make sentences with new words. Pronounce new vocabs. Quick quiz at the beginning of the session Thinking odd Translate into Arabic and converse

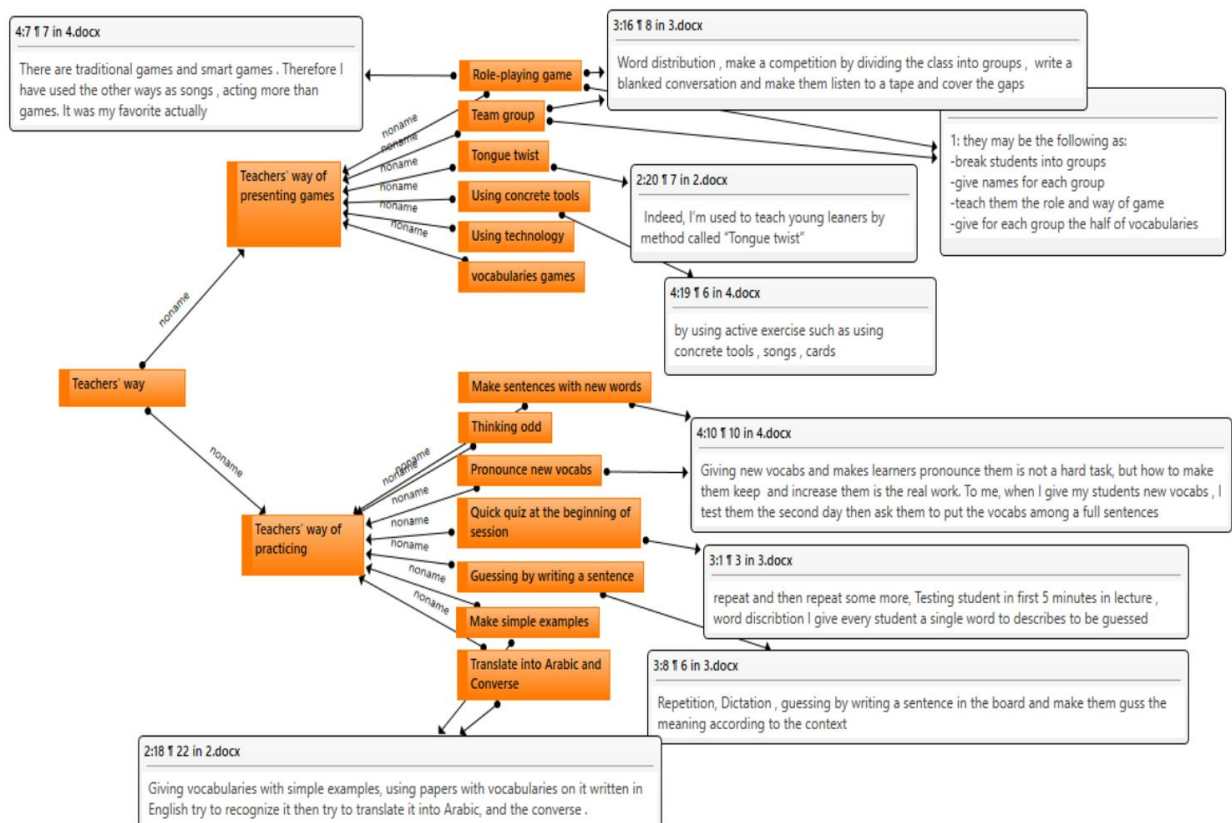


Figure 1: Network graph of study

4.1 Theme 1: Impact of game-based (fun-/based) strategy of teaching on improving students' vocabulary.

Teachers' responses to questions about the impact of using games to improve students' vocabularies level were coded under two sub-themes. The respondents believe that using game or creative fun-based strategy help students to improve their (1) communication skills and (2) personal skills. This implies that more efforts should be placed on extending the game and fun-based applications, strategies, books, and movies to help students increase their vocabulary. Most of the teachers stated that applying an interactive game-based teaching style can boost students' brain power, improve their communication skills, cause students to gather into a group, overcome their shyness to speak in front of other people. Few quotations from teachers who believe that fun/game-based teaching strategies will boost students' communication and skills for English speaking are:

"... different studies revealed that games are beneficial in vocabulary learning because they enhance student's ability to memorize words, encourage student's interaction, and improving their communication skill..."

"...by asking them to explain something in front of other students, and I encourage them for that, after that, I tell them that they the best speakers. The main goal is to remove the shyness of using the target language..."

"...using game make the lecture more interesting and active..."

"... using game ...caused... good presence of the students..."

Communication requires speaking mastery and speaking requires sufficient vocabulary knowledge. With limited vocabulary, the learners cannot communicate with others. Sometimes it is difficult to group students to make schoolwork easier and more rewarding, and many tests that they take in school include vocabulary questions. Learning English is crucial as it has become part of all fields in Libya. The researcher suggested that one of the fundamental challenges that need to be investigated urgently is the lack of communicative competence among Libyan students (Saputra, 2018). Limited vocabulary hinders students' ability to express their feeling and communicating verbally. As this study suggested applying a creative way of teaching based on fun and game will help students. Communicative competence is crucial since it allows English learners to present and exchange their feelings, thoughts, concepts, desires and wishes (Owen et al., 2019).

4.2 Theme 2: Advantage of game-based (fun/-based) strategy of teaching for students.

To answer the second research question, teachers' quotations were reviewed, and seven codes were captured. Teachers stated that the fun/game-based way of teaching is encouraging and facilitating vocabulary learning because of its interactivity, accessibility, user friendly, and joyfulness. Some quotations from teachers are:

".....using the game or any creative way of teaching vocabulary is an easy way to remember because they feel fun and happy at the moment...."

".....using play-role by asking them to explain something in front of other students, and I encourage them for that, after that, I tell them that they the best speakers. The main goal is to remove the shyness of using the target language...."

"...achieving the benefits of creative and fun-based teaching strategies...."

"... It depends on students, who are interactive with apps games; on the other hand, students with interactive games."

Researchers confirmed the effectiveness of game-based strategy such as online-based-game vocabulary learning (Abrams & Walsh, 2014; Bytheway, 2014, 2015; Yip & Kwan, 2006); computer games (Klimova & Kacatl, 2018; Tadayon et al., 2007) enhance learners' motivation (Lan, Hsiao, & Shih, 2018) and performance (Stieler-Hunt & Jones, 2019), and helps students obtain knowledge and skills through experiencing the content and mechanism in the contextual game-based learning (Prensky, 2003).

4.3 Theme 3: teachers' way of teaching vocabularies

To answer the third research question, a theme with two subthemes were captured from teachers' quotations. Reviewing teachers' responses, the researcher captured that the teachers' interactive classroom way to help students memorize vocabulary could be categorized into subthemes (1) Teachers' way of presenting the game and (2) Teachers' way of practicing vocabularies.

The teacher way of presenting games was coded as Tongue twist: "... I'm used to teaching young learners by a method called Tongue twist"; using technology; and vocabularies games applications. A teacher stated: "...there are traditional games and smart games. Therefore, I have used the other ways as songs, acting more than games.... It was my favorite".

Teachers also using supplementary material such as concrete tools as it stated by one of teacher: "... I make my class practical by using active exercises such as using concrete tools and cards...."

The other methods of game-based teaching teachers use were: Role-playing game and Team group:

"...divide students into groups to search for certain words in the book which will also enhance their reading...."

".... break students into groups -give names for each group -teach them the role and way of game -give for each group the half of vocabularies.

".... make a competition by dividing the class into groups, write a blanked conversation and make them listen to a tape and cover the gaps...

Theme Teachers' way of practicing vocabularies were coded as: Guessing by writing a sentence; Make a simple example; Make sentences with new words; Pronounce new vocabs; Quick quiz at the beginning of the session; Thinking odd; Translate into Arabic and Converse. Teachers suggesting that the best effective teaching strategies are guessing from a sentence: "...by writing a sentence in the board and ask students to guess vocabulary from context", make a simple example for new words and make sentences with those new words. The other teacher asks students to "pronounce new vocabs loudly" which help them to be familiar with new vocab. Some other teachers preferred to make quick quizzes at the beginning of the session. An exciting method one of the interviewees use is asking students to think odd (e.g., "The best interactive classroom games you have used to teach or memorizing vocabularies is ask students to tell me five odd one about the new vocabulary...". Translate new vocab into Arabic and converse is another practice suggested by a teacher who stated: "I teach new vocabularies with simple examples, using papers with vocabularies on it written in English.....try to recognize it then try to translate it into Arabic, and the converse...." It has been reported that rely on traditional methods of English teaching is a substantial reason for a low level of proficiency in English speaking skills among Libyan students (Ben Hamid, 2010). Libyan students do not pay attention to English language speaking or just neglect it and concentrate on the other English language skills. Speaking skills are generally not usually tested in schools (Shihiba, 2011). Abukhattala (2014), Spawa and Hassan (2013) explained that language teachers believe that the essential skill in language learning is speaking because it prepares students for the real world. However, in the Libyan English education context, these beliefs could not be put into practice because of the Libyan national examinations' neglect of English-speaking skills. Therefore, it is necessary to explore if and how effective are the activities based on the CLT approach in enhancing Libyan students' English language speaking abilities. Repetition, Dictation, guessing by writing a sentence on the board and make them guess the meaning according to the context "Giving new vocabs and makes learners pronounce them is not a hard task, but how to make them keep and increase them is the real work. When I give my students new vocabs, I test them the second day, then ask them to put the vocabs am Teacher's responses to questions about the impact of using games to improve students' vocabularies level? were coded under two sub-themes. The respondents believe that using game or creative fun-based strategy help students to improve their (1) communication

skills and (2) personal skills. This implies that more efforts should be placed on extending the game and fun-based applications, strategies, books, and movies to help students increase their vocabulary. Most of the teachers stated that applying an interactive game-based teaching style can boost students' brain power, improve their communication skills, cause students to gather into a group, overcome their shyness to speak in front of other people. Few quotations from teachers who believe that fun/game-based teaching strategies will boost students' communication and skills for English speaking are:

on full sentences" "... repeat and then repeat some more, Testing student in first five minutes in lecture, word description I give every student a single word to describes to be guessed...." Reviewing the related literature shows that an imaginative storytelling gaming design and learning content are included to show the authentic and contextual environment in the teaching and learning practice (Prensky, 2003; Zin et al., 2009). Researchers also approved those supplementary materials are adequate for memorizing new vocabulary if presented in graphics, animations, and audios to help learners accomplish the game tasks (Lin et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion

Semi-structured interviews on the participants' experience were conducted, and thematic analysis of the transcribed dialogues was performed using ATLAS.ti software. English vocabulary deficiency among Libyan students opens multiple opportunities to innovate in teaching English vocabulary. This situation stimulates researchers' interest in developing the most advanced language learning skills and techniques, especially in vocabulary teaching. It makes the use of as a means of communication inevitable. The themes that emerged in this study can help educate policymakers and teachers to develop game-based methods and support systems to apply these styles. However, the outcomes of this study should be further investigated to explore its effectiveness quantitatively. In addition, the implementation of the different strategies needs to be surveyed to confirm its general principles are computers applicable in the Libyan context. Therefore, further research is needed to identify any potential correlations among these different themes captured in this study to develop students' vocabulary. Teachers' game adaptation experience also needs further investigation. The informal way of language learning is evolving, and so the methods of vocabulary learning that learners select, develop, and use are also changing. To ensure that learning in structured contexts remains successful and essential to the experiences of language learners in the real and digital environments around them, students and teachers need to explore how interactive media influences the vocabulary learning strategies and processes of learners. Strategies are practicing that learner actively want to guide their language learning, and when learners use them implicitly and naturally, language learning strategies become language learning processes (Bytheway, 2014). Although games create a supportive learning environment for instructing grammar, it motivates students to practice and learns a notable amount of vocabulary actively and effectively. At the same time, it will build up interpersonal relations among the teacher and students.

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