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The Acquisition of New Vocabulary through Games in the Process of Learning English as a Foreign Language

» Abstract

This research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of games as a useful strategy to promote students' language proficiency. Researchers thought that students seemed to learn new vocabulary faster and retain it better when applied in a relaxed, comfortable environment, for instance, when they are playing games. They also confirmed that the use of games in class helped students to obtain and to retain new vocabulary in a more efficient way rather than using the traditional methods, like grammar translation or just memorizing.

The quantitative method was used in the process of observing and collecting data through open interviews to teachers, and surveys to students. Sixteen students formed two groups, divided in an experimental and a non-experimental group, they both took a pretest and a posttest. As a result, the experimental research group succeeded in the scores overcoming the non-experimental research group demonstrating that the use of games is a pedagogical strategy in the

acquisition of new vocabulary in the process of learning English as a Foreign Language.

» Introduction

Nowadays the issue of bilingualism has great relevance, according to the article "Bilingüismo en Colombia: problemas de la educación" not speaking a second language may turn into a "linguistic barrier" and this can cause individuals to feel isolated from society. And vocabulary is a major aspect in order to communicate effectively in English, and according to Wilkins (1972) "The fact is, that without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing at all can be conveyed".

Based on this, Researchers thought about an effective strategy which facilitates the learning process of new vocabulary in the sixth graders at a public school and that also improves, motivates and offers a better lifestyle to their community. According to Gonzalez, Villota & Medina (2017), the strategy is an integral and transversal concept in the

field of education, which generates a great relationship with the student and professor.

In addition, the research pretended to find out if the use of games can help in the acquisition of new vocabulary considering that, playing games in the classroom with a purpose leads to a pleasant environment for learners.

» Theoretical Framework

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is not just a simple word, it is a lexicon, Cummins (2016). Moreover, the stock of words used by or known to a particular people or group or person.

Vocabulary development is also a primary determinant of reading comprehension. Readers cannot understand the content of what they are reading unless they understand the meaning of most of words in the text. Research tells us that language learning occurs through interaction. Therefore, the point of learning language and interacting socially, is not to master rules, but to make connections with other people and to make sense of experiences.

English Language Learners (ELLs) classrooms should be full of active learners who are hardly ever silent. Structured talk about academically relevant content rather than rote memorization of word lists is necessary. It is important to model and teach deliberate strategies for clarifying word meaning as well as to provide students opportunities to

use the words in context. Children have to talk as well as listening. According to Cummins (1980), students develop oral language within the first two years of immersion in the target language; however, academic language takes about 5 – 7 years.

Teachers of ELLs need to provide instructions in which oral language development, content learning, and literacy development support one another. Native speakers generally learn to read words they already use in speech, while ELLs need to learn what the words mean, and how to say them as they are learning to read. In order for ELLs to catch up to native speakers, they must expand their vocabulary. Teachers can assist ELLs by directly teaching vocabulary within a meaningful context and providing them with many encounters with language. This will help children to discover the joy and power of literacy.

The passive vocabulary means that the subject can understand without help, alone, but is not able to use or to produce a message. For example, you may know that Gestalt therapy is a matter of psychology, but you are unable to explain yourself what this method is. This is a unidirectional way.

The active vocabulary is when a person is able to use the vocabulary because it is fully integrated into his/her everyday language and is capable of producing messages with it. It is the kind of vocabulary, which a person understands and uses when required without assistance. According to Nation (2001) the active vocabulary can be easily activated by other words “because it has many incoming and outgoing links with other words”. **Game**

All activities performed for recreation or entertainment, which account for enjoyment or the enjoyment of those who practice it. The game differentiates work, art and even sport, so it is not a necessary requirement to achieve. Still, the game can be used for educational purposes as an educational tool. Española, (2016). Moreover, game is also considered the best way for learning from physical activities to affective partner.

According to González, Villota & Medina (2017), the integration of different and varied tools in academia allows teaching and learning processes to become a meaningful experience for students in any field. Gonzalez (2015) says that obtaining a significant value from academic tools in English classes, may be a determinant factor in the planning and development of classes in which students will be able to acquire the language they study in an easy and flashy way, and with a fairly high motivation.

Second Language Acquisition

According to Gass and Selinker (2013), the second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the process of learning another language after the native language has been learned. Sometimes the term even refers to the learning of a third or fourth language.

The important aspect in that (SLA) refers to the learning of a nonnative language after learning of native language. The second language is commonly referred to as L2. As with the phrase “second language”, L2 can refer to any language learned after learning the L1, regardless of whether it is the second, third, fourth, or fifth language. By this term,

we mean both the acquisition of second language in a classroom situation, as well as in more “natural” exposure situations. (Gass – Selinker, 2013).

Foreign Language Learning

In order to state a definition about foreign language learning it is necessary to clarify the difference between foreign language learning and second language learning since these two concepts tend to be confusing for some people or even taken as synonyms one of each other.

Because of the above, some definitions from different authors are presented below, according to Richards and Schmidt (2002)

“Any language learned after one has learned one’s native language [is called second language]. However, when contrasted with foreign language, the term refers more narrowly to a language that plays a major role in a particular country or region though it may not be the first language of many people who use it. For example, the learning of English by immigrants in the US or the learning of Catalan by speakers of Spanish in Catalonia (an autonomous region of Spain) are cases of second (not foreign) language learning, because those languages are necessary for survival in those societies. English is also a second language for many people in countries like Nigeria, India, Singapore and the Philippines (plus Spanish), because English fulfils many important functions in those countries (including the business of education

and government) and Learning English is necessary to be successful within that context. (Some people in these countries however may acquire English as a first language, if it is the main language used at home).”

Crystal (2003) notes that *first language* is distinguishable from *second language* (a language other than one's mother-tongue used for a special purpose, e.g. for education, government) distinguishable in turn from *foreign language* (where no such special status is implied). He also notes that the distinction between the latter two is not universally recognized (especially not in the USA).

Stern (1983) believes that there is today consensus that a necessary distinction is to be made between a non-native language learnt and used within one country to which the term *second language* has been applied and a non-native language learnt and used with reference to a speech community outside national or territorial boundaries to which the term *foreign language* is commonly given. He argues that while the distinction between «second» and «foreign» has a certain justification, it is perhaps less important than it has sometimes been made out to be and it may be misleading. He notes that the distinction became popular after World War II in international organizations, such as UNESCO, in order to meet nationalist susceptibilities in discussions on language questions. Fasold and Connor-Linton (2006), Falk (1978) and Hudson (2000) provide similar definitions for the two terms. O'Grady *et al.* (1384) don't mention the exact terms «second» and «foreign» language, but they emphasize on the role of learning

environment in teaching non-native languages.

Acquisition

According to Krashen (1981), language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language-- natural communication--in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding.

Learning

It is the activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being thought or experiencing something Merriam Webster, (2016). Learning means what is or can be known by an individual or by a human kind.

Learning requires a relatively stable individual behavior change. This change is produced after associations between stimulus and response. The game is necessary in children to stimulate learning and in the acquisition of a language is also essential regardless the age.

» Methodology

Given the purpose of the research which is to evaluate the effectiveness of using games in the acquisition of new vocabulary when learning English as a foreign language, the research applied the quantitative methodology. According to Murray (2003) the

quantitative method, focuses attention on measurements and amounts of the characteristics displayed by the people and events that the researcher studies. In other words, the quantitative methodology is one that allows you to examine the data numerically, especially in the field of statistics.

There was a pretest and a posttest, a survey to the students about the use of games in English classes, and in the process of collecting data to get information related to the objectives in this research; the researchers divided the class into two small groups. All students from both groups solved the pretest but, then the second group that from now on will be called the experimental research group (E.R.G), received training in using games in order to increase their vocabulary. There were eight students in this group, selected randomly. The students performed different activities using games while learning vocabulary during twenty sections, fifty five minutes each.

There were eight students, also selected randomly in the second group, which from now on will be called the non-experimental research group, (N.E.R.G). This group did not receive any training with games; they just received classes in a traditional way, learning vocabulary through repetition.

Procedure

In the pre-test students received a list of twenty English words related to sports which they had to translate into Spanish. This activity was done to estimate the level of knowledge of the sixteen evaluated students; after checking the results, researchers found out

that the level was very low and they could not reach acceptable scores in the pre-test.

The next step was to explain students the meaning of the twenty English words listed in the pre-test, using a matching game with flash cards. After several repetitions, students were able to identify correctly all the words.

Then, students were separated into two groups, the Experimental Research Group and the Non Experimental Research Group. Investigator implemented three different games with the ERG. The first game was the Acting Out game, where the class was divided into two groups, students from each group took turns in order to act out a sport as the opposite group had to guess the name of the sport. The winner was the group with higher number of correct guessed sports.

The second activity was a matching exercise. The black-board was divided in two parts, in one side, the teacher posted flashcards with pictures and on the other side the teacher posted word cards corresponding to the English name of each picture. Students worked in groups in order to promote collaborative work. One student was selected per group and they had to match a picture with any word the teacher mentioned from the board. If the two cards match, they could keep them making a point, if they do not match, they had to turn them back over. The next students had to try to remember what was on each card and where it was in order to make a point. The game was over once all the cards were matched.

The last game was The Hangman. The class was divided into two groups, each group

chose at a time one person to be named the host and the rest of the group were named the players. The host chose a secret word, drew a blank line for each letter in the word then the players from the opposite group started guessing letters to guess the secret word. The host filled the blanks with the corrected letters the players mentioned. The host drew a part of The Hangman for every wrong guess. The winner was the group that could guess the secret word before the host finished drawing The Hangman.

After these three games were implemented, researches noticed that they were suitable to the students. They easily understood and follow the instructions, and as they practiced them, they enjoyed them more and more. In other words, it was evident that the specific objective number one in this particular case was accomplished during the process by demonstrating that the chosen games were appropriated for the development of the planned lesson.

Another important aspect researchers figured out after performing the games, was that games were an important tool to help students in their process of learning new vocabulary, students in the E.R.G had a more positive attitude towards the new methodology and they were more active and participative as well in comparison with the N.E.R.G. The time spent on every game was twenty minutes each.

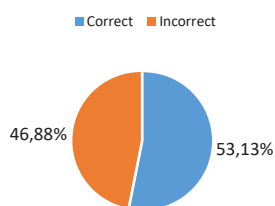
The activities performed with the Non Experimental Research Group were about traditional techniques of teaching a foreign language such as oral repetitions, unscramble sentences, translation from Spanish to English and vice versa.

At the end, there was a teacher – students’ feedback to enrich the investigation and as evidence to support the field work. The last activity was the survey applied to the Experimental Research Group which is explained below.

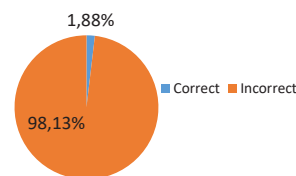
The graphic below corresponds to the pre-test presented by the eight students from the Experimental Research Group. (E.R.G). It is clear that a high percentage of the students did not have any knowledge about the words they were tested. The test consisted in giving Spanish meaning to the twenty English words, these words were related to sports and some sport verbs as well. In this pretest only 1, 88 % of the answers were correct.

After students in the E.R.G presented the pre-test, they were trained in the acquisition of the new words by playing some games. After students received training and practiced with games, they presented a post-test, obtaining these results.

POST TEST EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH GROUP
8 Students.

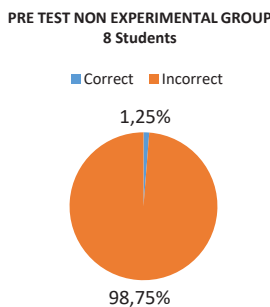


PRE TEST EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH GROUP
8 Students.



The results show that students from the Experimental Research Group ERG, increased their knowledge in comparison to the pre-test results. In the pre-test, students obtained 1.88 % of correct answers and in the post-test; students obtained 53% of correct answers. This means students had 51% of progress in their knowledge accomplishing the intended objectives.

The pre-test also was presented for a group of eight students that was called the Non Experimental Research Group (N.E.R.G). This group was selected randomly and they did a similar pre-test than the Experimental Research Group did.

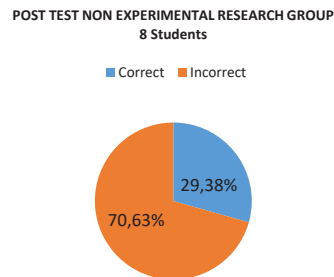


As it is shown above, the results presented by the Non Experimental research group, are similar to the ones presented by the Experimental Research Group, in both results, students did not even get 2% of correct answers.

After this pre-test, students got some training using traditional activities to learn the new vocabulary. These activities performed by the researchers consisted in twenty sections of 20 minutes each one. The first activity comprised in writing the 20 words on the board, and then the teacher pronounced the words and the students repeated them.

These repetitions were done several times, and then students were called to pronounce the words without the teacher's help. The second activity was giving some examples of sentences using the words from the vocabulary. During the third and last section students had to unscramble words in order to build meaningful words.

After doing the three previous activities, a post-test was set to be presented by students, this post-test was similar to the one presented by the Experimental Research Group.

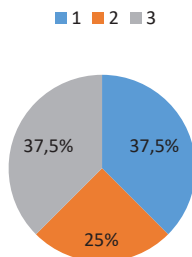


It is evident that students from the Non Experimental Research Group increased their knowledge about new vocabulary in 29,38% in comparison to the pre-test. But comparing between the results gotten in the post-tests presented by the Experimental Research Group and the Non Experimental Research Group, it is noticeable that the Experimental Research Group had over 24% better results.

It is noticeable to the researchers that games played an important role in the process of learning new vocabulary. This information was revealed by results closely linked to the objectives proposed at the beginning of this investigation and students feedback.

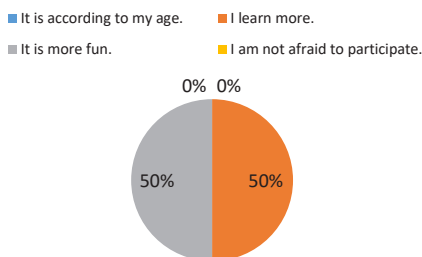
Survey Statistics

1. Which activity did you like the best?



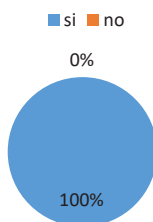
Researchers wanted to take in consideration the students' opinion about the different games played in the classroom to support information and for future references.

2. Why did you like it more?



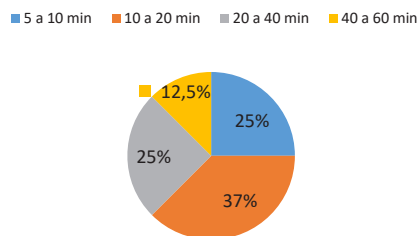
The results show that students based their selection in the fact that the mentioned games are funnier and make them feel confident when participating in class.

3. Do you think games should be implemented in all classes?



This question was designed to sense students' point of view in reference to the intensity games should be used in English classes, getting as a result that 100% of the interviewed sustained this conception.

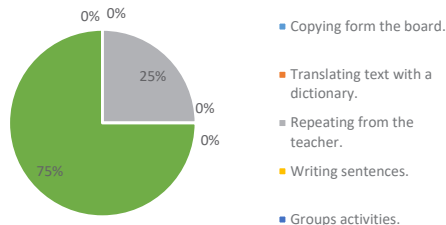
4. How long do you think each game should last?



About how long games should be used in class, from the four different choices students had to answer this question, the time between 10 and 20 minutes was the choice with a higher percentage 37% and the minimum percentage of students selected the 40 to 60 minutes option, which demonstrates that even though students really like and enjoy playing games in the classroom, they do not want to spend most the class time in this kind of activities.

From a different point of view, this statistic is positive since is not perceived that students want to use games as a time killer.

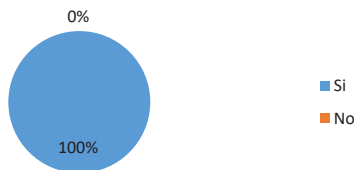
5. How do you prefer your English class?



Students were also questioned about the way they prefer an English class in order to confirm or deny if the use of games works positively in the process of learning a foreign language.

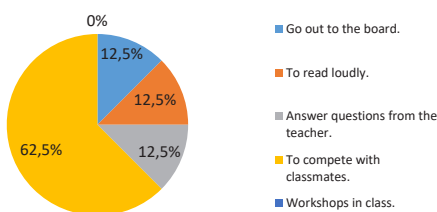
As it is shown in the graphic, most of the students prefer an English class developed with games, 25% of the students chose the option of repeating words after the teacher and none of the students preferred the other techniques.

6. Do you like to participate in class?



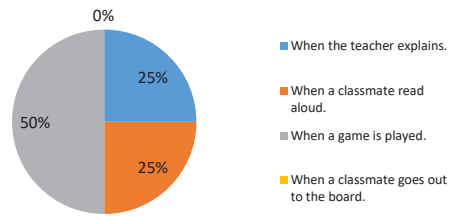
Considering that some students are shy or afraid to participate in class, researchers selected the question in order to sense the atmosphere in class. One hundred percent of the students responded positively to this question.

7. What activities do you like to participate in?



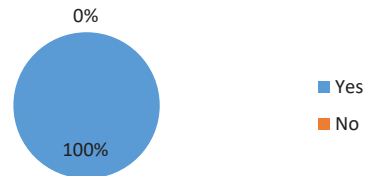
As shown in the graphic, students prefer competition between peers over other activities as a funny way of participation in class.

8. When do you pay more attention in English classes?



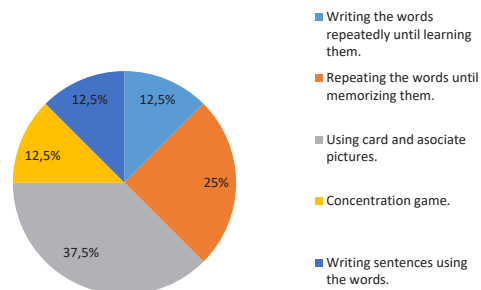
Taking into account that sometimes students do not pay attention for different reasons, researchers wanted to know which factor(s) could be affecting students' interest. The results show that 50% of the students are more awarded and attentive in class when they are playing a game. In other words, students' interest is focused in the class if they are involved in games activities.

9. Do you think the games played helped you to obtain more vocabulary?



The ninth question set in the survey was designed to know how important games are for students. This yes - no question was satisfactorily answered at 100% by students agreeing that games helped them to learn and increase their vocabulary.

10. If you must learn 20 words for a vocabulary English test, which technique do you prefer?



According to the statistics shown above, students prefer the games activities proposed to accomplish their action plan.

» Conclusions

After applying the research tools and in order to answer the question stated at the beginning of this investigation, the researchers came to several conclusions that can enrich future investigations or at least give a clue in the use of games when teaching a foreign language. The conclusions researchers take out from this paper work are:

1. Making a comparison in the results after applying the pre-test and post-test with both, the experimental research and the non-experimental research groups, it can be clearly seen that the group that received training with games had better results in the post-test.
2. It is hard to define which games are the most suitable to apply to students according to their ages. It depends more on the students' English level; if they understand the game they can perform it without difficulties.
3. The use of games is appropriated when the goal is to learn, practice and review vocabulary in a foreign language, in other words, when they are used as a pedagogical tool. Students always tend to enjoy funnier and innovative classes, if they are always interested in the class there is a higher probability that students learn more and better.

4. A great way to evaluate students' knowledge is through the use of games. In a relaxed environment while students play games without feeling the pressure of being observed and evaluated, the teacher assess different aspects. Researchers noticed that some students showed better results when playing games than when they presented the written text.

On the other hand, some other elements teachers evaluated, besides knowledge while students are playing games, are the social aspects. For instance, teachers estimate how students interact with some others, their active participation, the communicative competence, the cooperative group dynamics, and the loco motor system as well.

5. The period of time that should be spent on games in order to introduce or to strength a specific topic, has not been defined. However, it is confirmed that if the game last less than twenty minutes, it is almost useless due to several repetitions are needed to perform the game correctly, and if the game last more than 35 minutes, students can lose interest because it becomes predictable.

As a general conclusion, researchers have been able to demonstrate that the acquisition of new vocabulary through games in the process of learning English as a foreign language is possible when choosing the accurate material at the right time and always

with a purpose; benefiting students in their academic, cognitive and affective levels.

» Recomendations

1. The main suggestion associated with this investigation is to encourage teachers to include games in their school activities to break the routine and develop English skills, taking advantage of the positive attitude of students towards games and considering all the advantages mentioned throughout this work investigation. It is very important that teachers understand that games are an essential part of the class and should not be taken as an isolated activity, ice breakers, or time killers. Games are highly motivating for students, and as it is well known, motivation makes a process of learning meaningful.
 2. Based on some of the major problems with EFL students like shyness and sometimes lack of engagement, researches conducting this investigation propose the use of different games in the EFL classrooms in order to increase learning participation and motivation while having a learner centered environment as well.
 3. After students presented the pre-test they were unconsciously prepared for the post-test through several games adapted to particular topics taught in class, in order to facilitate the vocabulary acquisition and also
4. with the purpose to be able to compare results at the end.
 4. Taken from our experience in this research, the matching memory game is recommended to be played in class by students of all ages, due to its multiple advantages, such as visual memory, short time memory, fast thinking, concentration improvement and vocabulary acquisition. After practicing several times the matching game, students discovered that the use of repetitions helped them to retain more vocabulary.
 5. The Hangman is also another proposed easy game that requires little preparation. Pretested students found this well-known game very entertained and helpful to practice pronunciation and spelling of the words.
 6. The use of games in class is also recommended to evaluate students in an informal relaxed environment, avoiding inhibition of students when practicing the foreign language in front of others. Through the use of games students are learning unconsciously and responding in the same way.
 7. In general terms, games are suggested as a learning technique that facilitates the process of acquiring and practicing vocabulary, as a means of getting students' attention and a relaxing way to revise a previous taught topic among others. And even if playing games result in time of en-

tainment, it is worth to implement them in the classroom since they motivate learners.

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