

INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY INTO SECOND LANGUAGE VOCABULARY ACQUISITION: USING DIGITAL GAMES TO TEACH VOCABULARY

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Abstract

Since the turn of the century, vocabulary teaching has become an integral part of language teaching, which was once undervalued, because in any language, vocabulary is basic to all the four language skills. And conventional teaching methods included having students memorize a list of words either with their translations into L1 or definitions, drills and language chunks unlike contemporary methods which emphasize the effectiveness of applying modern technologies. The main purpose of this paper is to prove that games are an effective tool in terms of second language vocabulary acquisition. This paper, to a large extent, deals with a review of researches on teaching vocabulary through games. In addition, potential challenges are also included.

Keywords: digital games, vocabulary teaching, technology, CALL, MALL, challenges.

1. Introduction

Over the last few years, the popularity of the English language has soared in every field of education in Uzbekistan which calls for more sophisticated methods of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and General Purposes (EGP). According to Harmer (1991), English vocabulary, in particular, is regarded as “the vital organs and flesh of the language” which in turn requires language teachers to adopt a different approach to teaching vocabulary effectively so as to strengthen vocabulary and maximize vocabulary retention. Nevertheless, vocabulary teaching has once been paid the least attention before the rise of the modern methods (Allen, 1983; Carter, 1998; Richards, 1985), and Thornbury (2004) stated that vocabulary learning/teaching has become a vital part of language learning/teaching in recent years.

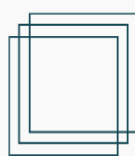
In this regard, incorporating technologies into vocabulary teaching, especially using a variety of digital games would give impetus to language learners to enrich their vocabulary in a relaxing and motivating atmosphere. Most researchers have agreed on the idea that games are an effective tool to teach vocabulary (Bakhsh, 2016; Chen, 2005; Erso’z, 2000; Kim, 1995; Lengeling & Malarcher, 1997; Masri & Najjar, 2014). And this work focuses on the importance of using games and challenges faced by teachers.

2. Literature Review

In contemporary classrooms, technologies play an essential role and language teachers are making good use of them to teach students. When it comes to vocabulary teaching, in particular, technologies such as mobile devices or computers can aid

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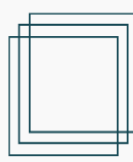


through which language learners may be able to play digital games to acquire new words.

To begin with, it is important to ascertain that the terms ‘MALL’ and ‘CALL’ should be well defined since they have, inevitably, been in existence in educational settings for the last few decades. Mobile-assisted language learning MALL is the integration of mobile devices into language learning process which is believed to have become inseparable from language learning in recent years (McKim, 2016). Valarmathi (2011) noted that “MALL is a subset of CALL (Computer-assisted language learning)” (p.46). In addition to this, Alepis & Virvou (2014) stated that MALL enables language learners to apply mobile technologies namely, cellular phones (mobile phones), mobile music players, PDAs, or mobile smartphone devices. According to Chuang (2016), with the assistance of MALL there is no limit to when and where learners can acquire a language. When it comes to CALL, with the presence of computers as supporting elements, it creates a digital environment where natural-like learning process is promoted (Levy & Stockwell, 2006; Palacios & Espejo, 2019). In this case, as opposed to MALL, educational settings are required to invest money and time as well as to provide with stable Internet connection and computer literate teachers/learners. Yet, it would enhance distance-learning and authentic communication (Gomez, 2014). Palacios-Hidalgo (2020) explained that two above mentioned approaches are considered as innovative language-learning focused approaches with great potentials.

As mentioned above, mobile devices and computers assist language teachers in making the language learning process creative and involving, especially creating an environment where learners can play didactic games to learn vocabulary. Rixon (1981) also suggested that teachers can inspire their learners to study as well as have fun at the same time through usage of games. Using digital games in the classroom has been a hot topic in the field and most scholars found games to be efficient in teaching the vocabulary of the target language. As a rule, games are competitive or cooperative. Rogers (1981) noted that “gaming is goal-defined, rule-governed and competitive that has a closure and engage the students” (p. 122). Rixon (1981) also added that games require students to compete or cooperate with each other through communication which makes the classroom activities enjoyable and unpredictable which in turn, according to Krashen (1985) and Swain (1993), provides learners with comprehensible input and output.

Another advantageous side of using digital gaming would be their creating a chance for introverted students to participate actively and improve their vocabulary. Uberman (1998) explained that reserved students can benefit from games played in small groups and test their knowledge.



3. Implementing digital games in teaching vocabulary

Obviously, implementation of using games in teaching vocabulary of English calls for sufficient technologies and digital natives in the classroom. Providing that there are not all the necessary technologies, teachers may find an alternative way to solve the problem such as working out contingency plans. In case that there is no Internet connection or devices such as computers or projectors which are needed for doing the activity, teachers may modify them making use of the existing materials. For example, assigning students peer work unless all the students have their own mobile devices for doing the games like Quizzes or Kahoot. When it comes to games like Jeopardy, potential solution can be using the board and sticky notes as an alternative for projectors.

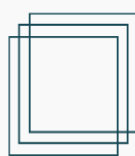
Games can be used in different stages of the lesson as pre-, while- and post-activities either to teach new topic-related vocabulary or to revise them. In the following part, digital games, namely 'Heads-up', 'Kahoot' and 'Jeopardy' will be discussed.

One of the most effective games to acquire new vocabulary would be 'Heads-up' which can be played in language classrooms as a group. In this game, a few students one by one come to the board and sit facing the other students so that he will not look at the screen. In the next step, teacher shows the words or alternatively pictures which are related to the new topic to the students and they are asked to give definitions to the words on the screen which volunteers have to find. In order for the game to be fun and engaging, time limit and points for each correct answer can be included. This game, especially, may raise interest in all the students regardless of their age.

The second vocabulary teaching game is 'Kahoot' which has recently gained popularity in Uzbek classrooms as a didactic game. It is as a matter of fact user-friendly and intuitive tool making it easy to create and participate in quizzes. Furthermore, teachers are able to create quizzes and slides from scratch which enables teachers to consider their students' age, level, interests and relevant topics prior to bringing them into classroom. The features of the game such as collecting points make the game competitive and entertaining. The required materials are stable Internet connection, mobile devices and computer (probably projector for offline classes).

Similarly, 'Jeopardy' can also be flexible and adapted into any classrooms with limited materials. Besides vocabulary, grammar questions and tongue twisters can also be added. In this game, students are grouped according to their numbers (most possibly 2-3 groups) and each group will select questions which were grouped under 3-4 categories with different marks (ranging from the easiest to the most complicated ones). The groups answering the questions will get the marks (alternatively, a variety of items as prizes). This communicative game promotes teacher-student and student-student interaction and group work.

Having said that, there are some possible challenges including lack of technologies and computer illiteracy which remain the biggest barrier in today's classrooms.



In terms of digital immigrants, they may take training courses to have a good command of technical devices considering that we are living in digital age and usage of modern technologies seems inevitable.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, digital gaming is a good opportunity for both language teachers and learners for the acquisition of vocabulary. Cutter (2015) noted the significance of technologies in the classroom stating that language learners become more involved and motivated while working with mobile devices or computers when compared to textbooks.

Obviously, learners' age, level, topics of interest and class inventory are the main factors to take into account so that there will be desired results.

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