Developing young learners' vocabulary retention through adapted Turkish educational games in EFL environment

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Abstract

Games are significant intervention strategies most of the teachers utilise in their teaching process. As they supply motivating and entertaining atmosphere for students, they create a necessity for them to acquire the components of the target language. This study mainly focused on the significance of using games particularly including the suggestion of the adapted version of Turkish educational games to teaching of vocabulary for young learners in EFL environment and analysing their impact on vocabulary retention capacities of learners. Participants were 44 female intermediate fifth grade students divided into two groups as the experimental and the control groups. In the experimental group, students practiced target vocabulary items through adapted Turkish educational games while the students in the control group exercised them only with activities in their books traditionally. The study indicated that there was a significant difference between two groups in terms of defining and using them for particular contexts.

Keywords: Games; teaching vocabulary; traditional Turkish games; young learners

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1. Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge is a significant component along with other language components such as pronunciation and grammar as through words; people are able to comprehend ideas and express themselves in a foreign language system. It is suggested that it is required to know words as well as their meanings for developing necessary skills in a language setting (Linse, 2005; Elfrieda & Kamil, 2005). Learning their native language, children tend to absorb all the information around them as they are expanding their vocabulary knowledge mainly consisted of more concrete and simple words. This concrete and simple word knowledge change into more complex and abstract ones through their school education; however, in a foreign language setting, the process of learning and teaching new words does not progress in such natural context unlike acquiring words in native language.

For this reason, this process demands hard work and carefully planned lessons by teachers (Orsel and Yavuz, 2016). Foil and Alber (2002) suggested that teachers are required to lower the pressure students experience while acquiring new vocabulary items and apply to some intervention strategies composed of a body of techniques that underline teaching new vocabulary items to students through getting their attention to new lexis or structures. Games are one of the efficient intervention strategies most of the teachers include in different parts of their lessons.

Lewis and Bedson (1999) affirm that as children are playing games they are exploring the environment around them by doing experiments and interacting with their friends. Moreover, they suggest that this journey enables them to create a stimulus for learning a language as especially for younger learners, learning a language itself does not provide a motivating factor for them. Traditional games or folk games can supply this context in an efficient way as The Knapp & Knapp (1976) claim that traditional children game act like mirrors that reveal the belief, culture and value of the societies. Furthermore, Demir (2016) and Gozcu and Caganaga (2016) assert that games not only support cognitive, affective, social and language development of learners but also aid for teachers in terms of identifying and understanding needs of their learners.

This study mainly focused on the significance of using games including adapted version of Turkish educational games in EFL environment for young learners with the purpose of teaching new words and aimed to outline the effect of these adapted version of Turkish educational games to teaching target vocabulary items for young learners in EFL setting with an experimental design study. The study seeks to find answers primarily based on these hypotheses;

    1.   There is not any significant difference between the traditional method and teaching through adapted Turkish educational games for practicing target vocabulary items.

    2.   Vocabulary instruction through adapted Turkish educational games enhances the vocabulary retention of the students.

    3.   Vocabulary instruction through traditional method enhances the vocabulary retention of the students.

2. Literature Review

Games are one of the significant intervention strategies teachers apply in their teaching process as they provide the context naturally in which learners need to use the language and its components. Games not only supply entertaining and motivating atmosphere but also enhance learners' vocabulary retention capacities proved by a body of research carried out recently. As particularly, traditional children game present contexts young learners are familiar with, it can be much easier to recall the target words without having difficulty.

2.1. Young learners and foreign language teaching

Scott and Ytreberg (1990); Slattery and Willis (2001); Pinter (2017); and Harmer (2002) define young learners within a general framework as;

- They are able to take responsibility for their own learning by questioning their learning process.
- They are able to cooperate with other learners.
- As they are active participants of their learning process, they enjoy imitating, watching, listening, touching and cooperating with their friends during this process.

- They are fond of creating new ideas and imagining; however, due to having short attention span, they get bored easily, so teachers are required to diversify methods and techniques while teaching young learners.
- They learn target information in an indirect way rather than direct one by absorbing information from all sides rather than focusing on just one part.

They enjoy being in learning environment in which activities are supported by a series of multi-sensory elements such as hearing, touching, listening, seeing and interacting. While teaching foreign language to young learners, teachers are required to vary their activities reflecting a list of tasks equipped with using learners' active involvement of their senses. Phillips (1993) also highlights the importance of simplification of learning tasks for young learners. This simplification should reflect not only simplifying linguistic features but also including entertaining elements in their teaching process.

2.2. The significance and quality of vocabulary teaching

Harmer (1991) accentuates the significance of having an effective word knowledge using such metaphor; 'vocabulary is the vital organs and flesh.' Furthermore, Zimmerman (1997a) identifies the vocabulary knowledge as the centre of language by stating that without vocabulary knowledge, it is not possible to focus on teaching grammar or linguistic knowledge used in communicative tasks and other language skills. Hiebert and Kamil (2005**)** reveal National Reading Panel's identification for rich and qualified vocabulary instruction within some specific findings;

- Active participation of learners in vocabulary instruction process maintains the knowledge in an effective way.
- Vocabulary instruction in rich contexts is beneficial for learning new vocabulary items
- Learning vocabulary items incidentally is more effective than teaching them explicitly
- Learners' motivation and attitudes, repetition of the items and diversity in contexts make significant contribution to incidental learning process.

Ellis (2005a) delineates the quality of the language instruction as the application of the intervention strategies indirectly or directly. Classroom tasks designed carefully by teachers not only promote incidental learning but also motivate learners to show their potentials and reflect their boundaries in communicative activities. In addition, teachers prepare friendly and motivating atmosphere for their learners which decrease the anxiety levels of learners and increase the learning potential of learners (Ismaili & Mustafai, 2017; Hu, 2017). Housen and Pierrard (2006) also attempt to outline the terms implicit or explicit instruction. Creating natural atmosphere for learning conditions, implicit instruction draws learners' attention to the target language in communicative task-based syllabus. Besides its contribution to the acquisition of necessary skills for performing the language tasks, it enables learners to use these skills in these tasks. As opposed to implicit instruction, explicit instruction designed within the framework structural syllabus seeks to direct learners' attention to target language forms and tries to raise learner's metalinguistic awareness. With the interruption in learning/teaching process, teachers make learners practice target forms with controlled activities in an isolated way. Explicit instruction develops learners' acquisition of necessary skill; however, it does not help them to use their skills in communicative framework.

2.3. Language games in foreign language teaching

Learners are able to experience real-life situations which comprise social interaction and observable outcomes. Yildirim & Sunbul (2016), Cimcim (2008), Carrier (1980) and Lewis and Bedson (1999) identify the advantages of using games in classrooms as;

- Through the usage of games, teachers go out of basic routines by creating motivating and entertaining atmosphere.
- Beside their challenging nature, games motivate learners to access new information in the learning environment.
- As learning entails great effort that learners are required to show during this process, games are able to maintain this effort in this process.
- Learners are able to develop themselves in four skills through games.
- Interaction and communication can be supported while learners are playing games.
- Teachers are able to create meaningful contexts for learners with the help of games.

Kelemen also (2018) stresses the significance of metacognitive learning encompassing the process of thinking and learning models such as awareness, action and motivation which games are able to

supply naturally in a learning environment. Some studies have been carried out with the aim of revealing the efficiency of language games to the learning/teaching vocabulary in EFL environment. These studies proved that language games were effective tools for presenting new vocabulary items and had benefits for learners' remembering new words for a longer time (Tahari, 2014; Hursen & Salaz, 2016; Uberman, 1998; Cimcim, 2008; Anıl, 2011; Tuan, 2012). Furthermore, it is indicated that games as natural stimuli are useful tools used with the purpose of presenting and practising target vocabulary items. It is verified that many resources support the usage of games in teaching foreign language in terms of its efficiency for creating stimuli for learners; however, there are not enough studies for proving their efficiency in learning/teaching process, particularly in learning /teaching target vocabulary items. Another point is that in the context of benefits of adapted traditional games for teaching foreign language, it has been found out that there have not been any studies so far.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study carried out with a quasi-experimental design study aimed at analysing the impact of adapted Turkish educational games on the vocabulary retention capacities of the students. The experimental and control groups were randomly selected. The experimental group practised the target vocabulary items through adapted version of Turkish educational games as well as the activities in their books whereas the control group made exercises only with the activities in their books without playing games. To analyse the results of the pre-test and post-test, SPSS evaluation system was utilised. With the comparison between the results of the pre-test and post-test, it was determined whether the training with these adapted games or traditional method was more effective for the vocabulary retention of the students.

3.2. Participants

Participants of the study consisted of 44 female intermediate level fifth grade students at a secondary school whose ages differed from 10 to 12. Students were divided into two groups randomly selected as the experimental and the control group. The number of students in the experimental and the control group was equal.

3.3. Procedure

The study designed as quasi-experimental one comprised 4-week training. The teacher began a new unit, 'Movies' and aimed at searching the effect of adapted version of Turkish educational games on the vocabulary retention capacities of the students. Forty target vocabulary items were listed along with the objectives within the framework of the target unit by the teacher. Before the training, the pre-tests were applied to students with the purpose of revealing their pre-knowledge about the unit and making a comparison with their post-tests results. The students were divided into two groups as the experimental and control groups. Students in the experimental group dealt with target vocabulary items through adapted version of Turkish educational games; however, the ones in the control group focused on these items by interiorising them only with the activities in their books. The 4-week schedules were prepared by the teacher for presenting and practising the target vocabulary items;

Table 1. Four-week schedule

1st Week	Target vocabulary items; Types of movies
2nd Week	Target vocabulary items; Words for stating opinions about movies
3rd Week	Target vocabulary items; Adjectives for describing the movie characters
4th Week	Target vocabulary items; Revision of the all target vocabulary items

After the training, the post-tests were applied to determine to what extent students gained target vocabulary items and to make a comparison between the experimental and the control groups through the results of their pre-tests and the post-tests.

3.4. Data results

In this study, the pre-tests results indicated that as the value was p = 0.389 > 0.01, there were not any significant differences between the pre-tests results of the experimental and the control groups statistically.

Table 2. Pre-test results

		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired Differences							
				Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation		Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	öntest - öntest2	1,09091	5,82204	1,24126	-1,49044	3,67226	,879	21	,389

The post-tests results revealed that as the value was p = 0.000 < 0.01, there were significant differences between the post-tests results of the experimental and the control groups statistically.

Table 3. Post-test results

		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired Differences							
				Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation		Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	sontest - sontest2	10,22727	11,12240	2,37130	5,29588	15,15867	4,313	21	,000

The analysis of the standard deviations between groups indicated that while the standard deviation of the experimental group was 10, 87, the control group's one was 7, 10. The value of the success average in the experimental group was 28, 90; however, the control group's value was 18, 68.

Table 4. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	*n*	SD	SEM
Pair 1	Post-test1	28,9091	22	10,87553	2,31867
	Post-test2	18,6818	22	7,10055	1,51384

4. Findings and Discussion

The study seeks to find answers primarily based on these hypotheses;

1. There is not any significant difference between the traditional method and teaching through adapted Turkish educational games for practicing target vocabulary items.
2. Vocabulary instruction through adapted Turkish educational games enhances the vocabulary retention of the students.
3. Vocabulary instruction through traditional method enhances the vocabulary retention of the students.

The study revealed that there was a significant difference between the traditional method and teaching through adapted Turkish educational games for practicing target vocabulary items. As the value presenting the success average of the groups indicated a significant difference; for this reason, teaching through adapted Turkish educational games for practicing target vocabulary items were more effective than the traditional one. The teacher aimed at teaching 40 target vocabulary items within the scope of target unit. The post-tests results of the groups presented the students in the experimental group recalled the target vocabulary items better than the ones in the control group; however, practicing target vocabulary items through a traditional method was not effective enough to make students recall the target vocabulary items in the post-test. Totally, teaching through

adapted Turkish educational games for practicing target vocabulary items was effective for students' recalling target items correctly.

5.Limitations

As the sample consisted of only female students, the study had a limitation for revealing the benefits of adapted Turkish educational games for practising target vocabulary items for female participants; for this reason, this study should be conducted with only male or mixed groups in a different context through further studies. Furthermore, the scope of the study was restricted with one unit training; 'Movies' which was another limitation of the study. Suggested games can be tested with different context supported by different vocabulary items.

6.Conclusion

Games are effective sources for not only enhancing the vocabulary retention capacities of the learners but also motivating them toward learning a language. This study mainly focuses on outlining some suggested adapted version of Turkish educational games on the teaching of target vocabulary items in EFL and revealing the impact of these games on the vocabulary retention of the learners. The study indicated that there was a significant difference between the traditional method and teaching through adapted Turkish educational games for practicing target vocabulary items. Learners in the experimental group recalled the target vocabulary items listed within the scope of the unit by the teacher better than the ones in the control group. For this reason, it was found out that these adapted games were more efficient than traditional teaching method in terms of learners' recalling the target vocabulary items.

Appendix 1

Some examples of the adaptation of Turkish educational games to teaching vocabulary in EFL

1. CATEGORISATION (ADAPTED FROM EVİNİZE, DENİZE, KÖYÜNÜZE, OKULUNUZA GAME VERSION)

Level: Elementary **Length of the activity:** 20 min. **New Lexis:** Types of movies

Materials: A set of colourful paper, crayons, stickers and swatters. **Number of players:** Whole class

Skills to be practiced: Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Listening **Aim of the activity:** The aim of the study was to provide practice for target vocabulary items by promoting skill development.

Game: Types of movies are written on a set of paper with a different colour of crayons. The teacher acts what kind of movie he/she is watching at the moment. The student who guesses the word correctly sticks the word on different parts of classroom such as on the door or on the board. Students are divided into two groups. In each group, students listen to a sentence about movie types. The student who touches the word first with his/her swatter gets the point for her/his group. Hence, every student competes with each other to touch the word at first. The group getting the higher point will win the game.

2. GAME YES (HIMBIL)

Level: Elementary **Length of the activity:** 20 min.

New Lexis: Words used for stating feelings about something; frightening, interesting, exciting, great, boring and funny. **Materials:** Each group prepares 16 pieces of paper cut in the same size, pencil and score list. **Number of players:** Whole class (four students in each group. In total, there are six groups) **Suggested Structure:** What do you think about....?/Do you think it is...?/Is it......?Yes, it is/No, it isn't **Skills to be practiced:** Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Speaking **Aim of the activity:** the aim of the study was to provide practice for target vocabulary items by promoting skill development.

Game: The teacher forms six groups in the class. Each group consists of four students. In each group, students choose taught words and share them with other group members. Each student in the group writes the same word on four pieces of paper. In total, the group has 16 pieces of paper which includes the practice of four words. They also prepare a score list showing the winner of the group.   Students mix and hand out the pieces of paper. Every student must have four pieces of paper. Students change the pieces with each other in return. The student who saves same word on four pieces of paper says 'YES' by putting his/her hand on the table. Other students in the group must put their hands on his/her hand quickly as who says 'YES' gets 100 points. In return, who puts his/her hand on the winner that says 'YES' gets 90 points. The third one is 80 and fourth one gets 70 points. Players ask questions to the

winner about his/her opinion with target questions; 'What do you think about....?/ Do you think it is...? / Is it......?' The winner acts his/her opinion. Other students try to guess it. The students who guess correctly get an extra ten points in the game.

3. SHAKER (TUZLUK)

Preparing a shaker is a kind of origami activity. For the preparation of a shaker, watch a video from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5u7-E7GEjWg.

Level: Elementary   **Length of the activity:** 20 min.

New Lexis: Adjectives   **Materials:** Colourful papers for preparing shakers, pencil, a score list and flashcards including adjectives prepared by group members. **Number of players:** Whole class (pair work activity) **Skills to be practiced:** Vocabulary, Pronunciation **Aim of the activity:** The aim of the study was to provide practice for target vocabulary items by promoting skill development.

Game: The teacher directs students for a pair work activity and shows to students how to prepare a shaker. Every student prepares his/her own shaker in each group as well as a score list. The students write adjectives they choose for the game inner side of their shakers and draw colourful symbols outside of their shakers. One of the students in pair chooses the symbol written outside of his/her peer's shaker and says the number. The other one counts the number and opens his/her shaker. The student must guess the word and find the correct flashcard. If he/she finds it correctly, he/she gets the point. If he/she does not find, he/she cannot get the point.

4. POISINOUS BALL (ADAPTED FROM ZEHİRLİ EŞYA GAME VERSION)

Level: Elementary   **Length of the activity:** 20 min.   **New Lexis:** All taught vocabulary items

Materials: Word box with picture of words learned in this unit, ball and music. **Number of players:** Whole class **Skills to be practiced:** Vocabulary, Pronunciation **Aim of the activity:** The aim of the study was to provide practice for target vocabulary items by promoting skill development.

Game: Students are circled. Students give the ball one another in return when the teacher plays the music; however, when the music stops, the student who has the ball must choose the word from the box. If he/she finds the word correctly, he/she continues playing. If he/she does not find, the ball poisons the player and he/she must leave the game.

5. TANGLE (ARAPSAÇI)

Level: Elementary   **Length of the activity:** 20 min. **New Lexis:** All taught vocabulary items

Suggested Structure: Do you like.......?/What do you think about......?/Do you think....?/Is it.....?/What type of movie do you like.....?/What is your favourite movie or character?/What is......like?

Materials: A ball of yarn **Number of players:** Whole class **Skills to be practiced:** Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Speaking and Listening **Aim of the activity:** To provide practice for target vocabulary items by promoting skill development.

Game: Students are circled. Students give the ball of yarn one another in return by asking their questions. The student who gets the ball of yarn answers his/her friend's question. While the students are playing the game by throwing the ball of yarn, a tangle occurs inside the circle. When the ball of yarn finishes, the students try to untangle it. They ask questions to each other by whipping the yarn. When the tangle is untangled, the game finishes.

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