An adaptation of traditional Turkish educational games to the teaching of vocabulary in EFL environment

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Abstract

Vocabulary plays a vital role in all methods and approaches in ELT. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the significant sub-skills for not only receptive but also productive skills in foreign language learning process. As the techniques used to teach vocabulary vary in approaches for different purposes, it can be observed that they can be classified as conscious or explicit and unconscious or implicit ones. This paper aims to outline some traditional methods of vocabulary teaching particularly young learners; the significance of game –based teaching process in education; the application of educational games in language classes; some studies carried out with the purpose of searching the effects of educational games in foreign language learning process; the benefits of teaching frequent vocabulary through games for young learners through the related literature. This study concludes by suggesting an adaptation of some traditional Turkish games to the teaching frequent vocabulary to young learners in foreign language teaching.

Keywords: vocabulary teaching; game – based teaching process; traditional Turkish games; young learners; frequent vocabulary

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1. Introduction

Having effective vocabulary knowledge is one of the significant elements for reflecting one's potential of language skills. With other sub-skills of language system, it has a crucial place for learners to not only comprehend written or oral language but also produce their own words in a language area. Harmer (1991) states that "vocabulary is the vital organs and flesh" by identifying it at the centre of learning a foreign language learning process. Linse (2005) and Elfrieda (2005) claim that learners are required to know words with their meanings in order to improve their skills in a language context (Linse 2005 : cited in Sahar Ameer Bakhsh 201 6 ;Elfrieda (2005). Furthermore, Cameron (2001) suggests that one or two thousand words should be learnt by young learners to express themselves and share their ideas in written or oral performance. Children while acquiring their native language learn words with the interaction of their natural environment. With this interaction, they begin the acquisition process with simple and concrete words and with school education; this knowledge is improved wider and comprises more abstract and complex words. However, foreign language learning process does not proceed in such natural context. An account of this, the process of learning and teaching of vocabulary in EFL gets more demanding job for children. Foil and Alber (2002) claim that in order to reduce the effects of this stress during vocabulary learning session , teachers as being planners and evaluators of intervention strategies which highlight the acquisition of vocabulary while capturing the attention of young learners are required to apply a variety of techniques for teaching vocabulary , support learners' active participation in vocabulary instruction and give opportunities them to use the words in different contexts which enables them to comprehend these words deeply and automatically. Games are one of the intervention strategies most of the teachers utilize in their teaching process. Lewis and Bedson (1999) affirm that with games being a significant and natural element in the lives of children, children have journeys by doing experiments, making discoveries and interactions with their environments. In addition, they emphasize that particularly for younger learners, learning a language itself is not only tool for creating a motivation. By providing stimulus and motivating children in a language environment, games supply a context in which children comprehend the usefulness of learning a language. Traditional games called as folk games provide such context effectively as with their theory, The Knapps (1976) assert that traditional children games are like mirrors that reflect social values and rules of the culture and they are crucial for development of children in a healthy way. Children not only learn values and rules of their culture but also interact with each other in an acceptable manner through traditional games. The focus of this paper is to emphasize the usefulness of games in EFL environment and remarkably by drawing attention to the adaptation of Turkish traditional educational games to the teaching vocabulary for young learners, the paper outlines and suggests that since young learners are familiar with the context provided by traditional games ,vocabulary learning process of learners is facilitated and contextualised in that young learners reveal their potentials in both receptive and productive language areas without having difficulty.

2. Literature Review

As creating natural learning contexts for young learners, games are significant learning activities through which young learners can acquire target vocabulary implicitly. Analyzing the results of the studies, it can be suggested that using games for teaching target vocabulary is an effective tool which provides advantages to both cognitive and psychological process of learners during vocabulary learning process as by enabling motivating and entertaining atmosphere, games make learners feel

secure and as the vocabulary teaching process is contextualised through games, vocabulary retention can be facilitated. Particularly adaptation of traditional games to teaching vocabulary in EFL context can aid learners 'retention process an account of learners' familiarity with the context created with traditional games in their native languages.

2.1 Young Learners

Nunan (2010) states that young learner as a concept includes a large age period from 3 to 15 ages. While some researches attempt to categorize learners for their ages : 3-5 years old or 6-8 years old in a strict way , some of them claim that age is not only factor in this categorization (Nunan 2010; Philips 1993; Pinter 2017). Maturity level, social and cognitive potentials of learners is other factors that determine the characteristics of foreign language learning / teaching process (Philips 1993). Scott and Ytreberg (1990); Slattery and Willis (2001) outline general characteristics of young learners by stating that young learners are able to form basic concepts , mention the difference between real and imaginary world, question their learning process by taking responsibility about their own learning process and cooperate with other learners. Furthermore, by involving actively in learning process, young learners are fond of listening, watching, imitating, touching and having an interaction with their friends. As they have short attention span, they get easily bored and require different kinds of activities in the process (Slattery 2001; Harmer 2002). Harmer (2002) also mentions that young learners learn subconsciously like natural sponges by acquiring the information from all sides rather than concentrating on specific information.

2.1.1 Younger Learners and Older Learners

Pinter (1993) outlines the difference between younger and older learners by identifying that while younger learners think holistically in that they are able to comprehend in a meaningful way; however , they do not have enough ability to analyze the language system in detail and enough conscious about their learning process, they have less proficient in reading and writing skills even in their native language and enjoy imagining and creating new ideas, older learners attempt to analyze the language system by recognizing abstract concepts, are able to take responsibility for their learning process, get more conscious while learning, have realistic viewpoints and more developed reading and writing skills.

2.1.2 Young Learners and Foreign Language Teaching

Scott and Ytreberg (1990) point out some features for teaching foreign language to young learners by highlighting the significance of the active participation of young learners in learning process with their movements and involvement of their senses. Moreover, they suggest that young learners are allowed to play with language by singing, telling stories or creating nonsense rhymes. Since young learners'concentration span is too limited, teachers are required to vary their activities, organization or voice. In foreign language learning process , Mendez and Lopez (2004) state that not only conscious ,direct learning but also unconscious, indirect learning make a contribution to young learners' individualizing their learning process. They also indicate that language learners utilize both of the system. While conscious learning supports accuracy aspect of language acquisition, subconscious learning facilitates fluency aspect of learning process.

2.2. Vocabulary Teaching Methodology

Mendez and Lopez (2004) identify basic teaching methods such as Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, and Communicative Approach or Natural Approach which have been subjected to some researches with the purpose of their influence on young learners.

First language teaching method, Total Physical Response (TPR) developed by Asher emphasizes the significant relation between action and speech. Asher suggests that while speaking to young learners, commands should be at the core of the speech process which aids learners to create receptive knowledge of foreign language before they actively participate in productive stages. Second language teaching method, Silent Way conceived by Caleb Cattegno highlights the point that teachers should have passive roles by giving opportunity to their learners to be active ones in learning process with some materials such as colour charts or coloured Cuisenaire rods. The method also claims that learning is promoted by learners' creativity and discovery rather than their repetition or memorization of language patterns. Third one is Community Language Learning (CLL) designed by Charles A. Curran underlines the premise which underpins the utility of using counselling techniques in language learning/teaching process. By using counselling as a metaphor, Curran delineates the role of teacher as a counsellor, learners as the clients. Another method, Suggestopedia or Desuggestopedia developed by Bulgarian psychiatrist, Georgi Lazanov buttresses the notion that encompasses the techniques of concentration, consciousness and breath taking rhythmically with the support of decoration, furniture, music, organization of classroom setting and effective figure of the teacher. In this methodology, the significant element is that learners are required to memorize vocabulary chunks with contextualised materials rather than applying to translation techniques. Lazanov points out that learners should encounter whole meaningful texts which lead them to communicate actively, not solely memorization of isolated chunks. Last one, Communicative Language Learning which puts communication principle at the centre emphasizes that meaningful tasks have facilitative roles for learning. Meaningful and authentic materials have a crucial place in CLT (Richards and Rodgers 2001).

2.2.1 Teaching Vocabulary

Hiebert and Kamil (2005) identify vocabulary knowledge expanded and elaborated within the lifetime by declining the idea that vocabulary are able to be developed or fully mastered by learners. They refer to vocabulary knowledge as productive or receptive vocabulary. Productive vocabulary consists of list of words which learners utilize while speaking or writing. On the other hand, receptive vocabulary includes words of which learners allocate the meanings while listening and reading the texts. The words in productive vocabulary are familiar, frequent and well-known by learners whereas the issue in receptive vocabulary is vice versa. Furthermore, they claim that contextualised vocabulary knowledge of learners is composed with comprehensible and profuse vocabulary teaching instruction. Among National Reading Panel's detailed conclusions, significant points are that learners can create effective vocabulary knowledge when they involve actively in the process and incidental learning along with factors such as motivation, repetition and effective context rather than explicit instruction facilitates the vocabulary acquisition of learners. Thus, vocabulary instruction should focus on variety of activities which learners use their vocabulary knowledge (Hiebert and Kamil 2005).

2.2.2 Traditional Games and Vocabulary Teaching

Games provide opportunity to young learners for their versatile developments such as cognitive, social and psychological (Yücel &Gündoğdu 2012 ; Sierra & Kaminki 1995).They have a crucial place for reflecting societies' cultural features and values. Customs, values, beliefs of society are transferred from one generation to another through traditional games (Yücel &Gündoğdu 2012). There are some common games such as Blind Man's Buff, Hide and Seek, etc. played by children from different countries however in each country, these common games have different meanings in terms of discrepancy of cultures, values or beliefs in societies (Sierra & Kaminki 1995). Sierra and Kaminki classify traditional games as Ball Games, Blindfold Games, Board Games, Category Games, Drama and Pantomim Games, Guessing Games and Handclapping Games.

As traditional games are composed of physical skill, strategy, chance, repetition of patterns, creativity and vertigo, they support learners' versatile developments by promoting healthy atmosphere in learning environment (Sierra & Kaminki 1995). In her study, Agniezka Uberman (1998) states that to present vocabulary items, games are effective tools by motivating and entertaining learners. She also claims that learners are able to memorize and interiorise vocabulary items through games.

It is confirmed that although many resources emphasize the significance and advantages of using games in EFL environment, there are few studies carried out which prove their benefits for particularly vocabulary retention. It is also found out that there haven't been any studies about the usage and adaptation of traditional children games in EFL environment and vocabulary teaching process. Through their experiments, Rasolini & Aslanabadi (2013) and Tahari (2014) support the view that games have a positive impact on vocabulary retention of learners by creating motivating and entertaining atmosphere. Furthermore, to find out the effectiveness and usefulness of communicative and authentic games in foreign language learning process, Bulishi&Al-Issa (2017) and Hursen&Salaz (2016) reveal that games have facilitative tools for enhancing learners' motivation by creating a stimulus for language learning.

3.Conclusion

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the significant components for language learning. For effective vocabulary retention, games are precious resources to enhance learners' motivation by providing them stimulus towards language learning; however, there are few studies which reveal their usefulness for vocabulary teaching process. In these studies, the benefits of games are proved in terms of vocabulary memorization and its usage in particular contexts. This paper stresses particularly the effectiveness of usage and adaptation of traditional children games for vocabulary teaching process in EFL. It is confirmed that there haven't been any studies to support this issue. With this paper, it is suggested that as learners are familiar to context provided by these traditional games, subconscious vocabulary learning process is promoted by an adaptation of traditional children games in EFL environment.

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A. Appendix One: Vocabulary Game : Duck Duck Goose (Al Satarım Bal Satarım)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpvCmPNPl0U original version of game with its unique chants)
This adaptation version of traditional game can be used with the aim of practising learnt vocabulary items.

Level: Elementary   **Length of the activity:** 20 min.   **New Lexis:** Adjectives
Suggested Structure: Are you tall / short ….etc like……?
Materials: Word box with flashcards including pictures of animals, cartoon characters …etc which represent target vocabulary items. (In presentation stage of vocabulary items, same pictures should be used in that students can use suggested structure easily).
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. One of the students is the It. The It chooses a card from word box and animates the adjective in the card by turning around the circle. While the It is turning, he chooses one of his/her friends that wants to give an answer. He /She has to use the target structure; "Are you.....like....? "by giving an answer. If the answer of the It is YES, he/she starts to chase and tries to catch the IT. The IT has to sit down the place of his/her friend in the circle. If the It sits down, his/her friend becomes the new It. If the It doesn't sit down and is caught, he/she becomes the It again. If the answer of the It is NO, the It chooses another friend for answer.

A. **Appendix Two: Blind Man's Buff (Körebe)**

This adaptation version of traditional game can be used with the aim of practising learnt vocabulary items.

Level: Elementary   **Length of the activity:** 20 min.   **New Lexis:** Food and Drinks
Suggested Structure: Can I eat / drink..............? , Yes of course, I am sorry, you can't
Materials: Word box with flashcards including pictures of food and drinks. Scarf and music
Number of players: 6 players
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: One of the students becomes the It and his/her eyes are blindfolded with scarf. Five students are chosen and circled around the IT. Players also choose cards from the box. With music, students turn around the It. When the music stops, the It tries to catch one of his friends. If the It catches him/her, she/he asks for permission by using target structure "Can I eat/drink ......?" If the food or drink is healthy, the It allows by saying "Yes, of course". If it isn't healthy, the It refuses the permission by using target lexis. If The It gives correct answer, his/her friends becomes the new It. If The It gives wrong answer, he/she becomes the It again.