

The Effectiveness of Language Games in Teaching Vocabulary among First-year Students at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, TNU

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Abstract: This study focused on the effectiveness of language games in teaching vocabulary among selected first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration for the academic year 2018-2019. The specific problems pursued were as follows 1. What kind of language games can be used in teaching vocabulary among students? 2. What are the pre-test and the post-test scores in vocabulary of the respondents? 3. Is there a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents? 4. What is the level of acceptability of the games activities among the students? The study was conducted at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration for the academic year 2018-2019. The study employed the single group pre-test and post-test design coupled with documentary analysis in determining the effectiveness of the language game activities. The respondents were 50 regular first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration. The data were treated using frequency, percentage mean, standard deviation, test for dependent samples and weighted mean. The salient findings are as follows: Hangman, Bingo and Crossword are the most popular games, the post-test mean score (5.72) is higher than the pre-test (5.28) the computed T-value of 3.43, is significant at 1 percent level and the perceived acceptability level as to text, pictures/images, animation, color, originality of presentation and appeal to target user have weighted mean of 3.19, 3.11, 3.33, 3.23, 3.43 and 3.23 respectively. All fall in the acceptable category. Based from the findings, it can be concluded that: Hangman, Bingo and Crossword are the most popular; the students scored higher in the post-test than the pretest, the language game activities are effective and acceptable among students.

Keywords: Language Games, Language Games Approach, vocabulary, pre-test and post-test

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I. Introduction

English has become the international language of communication, especially in the areas of commerce, trade, media, culture, arts and education. Learning English therefore is a key to open many doors for any professional success. An individual needs to be skillful enough in the use of the language so that he can communicate easily. In a developing country like Viet Nam, citizens' knowledge in the English language must be enhanced to ensure that it will be able to communicate and participate smoothly in global or international affair.

In Vietnam, English is one of compulsory subjects learned at school. There are many difficulties when students learn English specially in learning vocabulary. Everyone has his own way to master his subject, and language games can make students learn the English vocabulary better. What should a teacher do if their students get bored? Using games can be an alternative solution to handle this problem. Games can help and encourage many students to sustain their interest in studying.

Language game is a very effective way to frame social and cultural learning. A game is a routines sequence of interactions between two agents involving a shared situation in the world.

In Vietnam, learning foreign language especially vocabulary plays an important role because it is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together. In order to communicate well in a foreign language, students should acquire an adequate number of words and should know how to use them accurately. Students practice vocabulary by making different sentences vocabulary, learn new vocabulary the way to use them and enrich their own knowledge. They said "practice makes perfect" so although learning English vocabulary not easy, but through games they can practice and gradually memory.

Vietnamese students usually feel bored in English lessons because they have not changed their learning habits, such as writing words on paper, trying to learn by heart or learning passively through the teacher's

explanations. To help students find language classes, especially English lessons more interesting, and to achieve more from games, the question, "Do games help students learn English vocabulary effectively, and if so, how?" is raised. After reviewing academic opinions on this specifically focused matter, we come to the conclusion that there are relatively few, action researches which included applying games in the classes, observing other teachers' classes, and interviewing both teachers and learners so as to elicit students' reactions, feelings and the effectiveness of games in English vocabulary learning. The research shows however that they are effective in helping students to improve their four skills and the ways of learning vocabulary.

II. Literature Review

According to Sloane Morass, Sao Carlos, Brazil, (2001), the teaching of vocabulary elementary levels was mostly incidental, limited to presenting new items as they appeared in reading or sometimes listening texts. This indirect teaching of vocabulary assumes that vocabulary expansion will happen through the practice of other language skills, which has been proved not enough to ensure vocabulary expansion. Nowadays it is widely accepted that vocabulary teaching should be part of the syllabus, and taught in a well-planned and regular basis. Language games are primarily used by students, to disguise their speech from others.

Newton (2001) refers to this approach as a way that can enable learners to manage their vocabulary meaning and develop their communicative skills at the same time. Newton (2001) refers to this approach as a way that can enable learners to manage their vocabulary meaning and develop their communicative skills at the same time. Many experts of language teaching methodology also agree that playing games is a good way to learn vocabulary, especially in CLT class.

With the use of games, the teacher can create various contexts in which students have to use the language to communicate, exchange information and express their own opinions (Wright, Betteridge and Buckby, 2001). Yalden (2004) comes to a conclusion that "learning through games could encourage the operation of certain psychological and intellectual factors which could facilitate communication heightened self-esteem, motivation and spontaneity, reinforcing learning. Improving intonation and building confidence". Some experts have also figured out characteristics of games that make vocabulary learning more effectively.

Lee (2001) lists several main advantages when games are used in the classroom, including "a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class", "motivating and challenging" "effort of learning", and "language practice in the various skills." Ersoz (2000) holds that games are highly appreciated thanks to their amusement and interest. Teachers can use games to help their students practice more their skills of communication. Lee observes, a game "should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do" (2000). Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages.

"Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All authors referred to in this article agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence, and generate fluency.' According to Lewis (2001), game context makes the foreign language immediately useful to the children. It brings the target language to life, and game makes the reasons for speaking plausible even to reluctant children.

Donn Byrne (2002) is one of the noted writers who has emphasized the importance of language games. In his practical handbook on the teaching of the skills needed for oral communication entitled, *Teaching Oral English* brought out by Longman in the series called, *Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers*, Byrne devotes a special chapter for games. He argues that games provide not only "a welcome break in the lesson routine." Also, "form an integral part at both the practice and production stages of learning". Jane Ellis (2004) in her book, *teaching English through English — Accurse in classroom language and teachings* feels that "games should provide some light hearted fun and entertainment."

Games provide a context for meaningful communication. Even if the game involves discrete language items, such as a spelling game, meaningful communication takes place as students seek to understand how to play the game and as they communicate about the game: before, during, and after the game (Wright, Bette ridge, & Buckby, 2005).

Aydan Ersoz states; "Vocabulary learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful vocabulary in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation."(The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VI, No. 6, June 2010)

According to Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen and Khuat Thi Thu Nga, December 2013, 'Games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. First, games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily. Second, games usually

involve friendly competition and they keep learners interested. These create the motivation for learners of English to get involved and participate actively in the learning activities. Third, vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom, and enhance students' use of English in a flexible, communicative way.' Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied.

III. Subject and Methodology

This study is limited to the students at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration as the main respondents of the study. The focus is on the effects of language games method in learning vocabulary words in English, as well as their vocabulary competence. The study was carried out within three months at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration.

This study made use of Single Group Pre-test Post-test Design because it involved one group, which received the pre-test and post-test. It means that the respondents were given a pre-test before the start of the lessons using Language games. Then the experimental period the same pretest was given.

The respondents of this study was the fifty (50) students involved in one class of the first-year students with 50 students were personally assigned to the same being one of the regular teaching staff of Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration. The selection and assignment of 50 student's respondents became advantageous for carrying out the study.

The used two sets of instruments for this study: questionnaire and pre-test and post-test questionnaires personally prepared by the researcher. The questionnaire was composed of questions eliciting some information about the games, topics, vocabulary. After it was constructed, it was shown to the research adviser for content validation. Some questions were rephrased, others were changed and the rest was retained. Afterwards, it was shown to some experts for further validation.

The second instrument prepared by the researcher was the game activities incorporated to the every lesson plan utilized in the formal delivery of the lesson the whole duration of the study. After the games were selected, it was presented using power point. It was shown to the adviser and experts for content validation.

The following statistical instruments were used to analyze and interpret the data. Frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation(s). T- test for dependent samples was used to find the significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students. To determine the level of acceptability of the language games activities, weighted was applied.

The formulas used in the study are given below:

$$\text{Sample mean} = \bar{x} = \Sigma X / n$$

Where:

ΣX is the sum of all the scores,

N is the number of respondents

n is the number of sample observations.

$$s = \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma(x - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Where:

S is standard derivation

x is each score

\bar{x} is the mean or average

n is the number of respondents.

The formula for the dependent t is:

$$T = \frac{\Sigma D}{\sqrt{\frac{n \Sigma D^2 - (\Sigma D)^2}{n - 1}}}$$

Where:

D is the difference between pairs of scores : $\bar{D} = X_2 - X_1$

The formula for weighted mean is

$$WM = (4f + 3f + 2f + f) / N$$

Where:

WM = weighted mean

f = frequency

N = number of respondents

The scale used for acceptability rating is:

Point score	Point Interval	Descriptive Rating
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4	3.50 – 4.00	Highly Acceptable (HA)
3	2.50 – 3.49	Acceptable (A)
2	1.50 – 2.49	Fairly Acceptable (FA)
1	1.00 – 1.49	Not Acceptable (NA)

IV. Results and Discussion

In this section, the researcher would like to present some results which were collected from the research.

4.1. Students' view on the Types of Games

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Responses as To Types of Games Preferred by the Students

Games	Yes	%	No	%
1. Number Game	17	34	33	66
2. Crossword	25	50	25	50
3. Bingo	35	70	15	30
4. Where My Glasses	10	20	40	80
5. Twenty Questions	11	22	39	78
6. Simon Says	20	40	30	60
7. Hangman	45	90	5	10
8. Guessing Games	7	14	43	86
9. Matching Games	13	26	37	74
10. Information Gap	16	32	34	68

(Source: Questionnaire)

Based on the table, forty five (45) or ninety percent (90%) of the respondents preferred Hangman, thirty five (35) or seventy percent (70%) liked Bingo while one-half of the respondents preferred Crossword as the games to be used in teaching vocabulary.

1.2. Students' Scores on the re-test and Post-test

Table 2: Students' Scores on the Pre-test and Post-test

Student No	Pretest Score	Post- test Score	Student No	Pretest Score	Post test Score
1	6	6	26	7	8
2	5	5	27	6	7
3	5	4	28	5	6
4	2	2	29	3	5
5	3	3	30	6	7
6	7	7	31	6	8
7	4	4	32	6	7
8	5	5	33	6	6
9	3	3	34	4	5
10	6	6	35	5	7
11	5	5	36	6	5
12	4	4	37	7	9
13	6	6	38	7	9
14	5	6	39	6	8
15	8	8	40	5	5
16	3	3	41	6	5
17	5	5	42	4	6
18	7	7	43	5	3
19	3	3	44	8	8
20	6	6	45	6	8
21	4	4	46	5	6
22	6	6	47	7	7
23	5	5	48	5	6
24	7	7	49	4	5
25	7	7	50	2	3

(Source: Questionnaire)

* Legend: In the questionnaire of pretest and posttest has 50 items. Each correct item equivalent to 0.2 so that perfect score is 10. (Score 9 equivalent to 45 items correct)

Table 2 shows the scores of the students in the pretest and post-test. As could be seen, majority of the students' scores fall in the interval 6-5, both in the pretest and in posttest. In the pretest, there were two students got mark 2 but in the post-test, there was only one student. In the pretest, there were 27 students got mark in the interval 5-6, however in the post test the number of students who got that interval was decreased, there were 22 students. The students got the interval 7-8 in the posttest were higher (more five students) than in the pretest. In addition, no student obtained score in the interval 10 – 9 in the pre-test while two students got marks falling in the highest interval.

1.3. Values for Testing Significant Differences between The Pre-test and Post-test Score of Students

Table 3: Summary of Values for Testing Significant Differences between Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Students

	Pretest	Posttest	T-value	Significance level	Interpretation
X (mean)	5.28	5.72	3.43	.01	Significant
S (standard deviation)	1.46	1.71			
Highest and lowest scores	8 and 2	9 and 2			

As shown in table 3, the scores in the pre-test obtained a mean of 5.28 and standard deviation of 1.46. The highest score is 8 while the lowest is 2. On the other hand, the scores of the post-test taught using Language Games method obtained a mean of 5.72 with standard deviation of 1.71. The highest score is 9 and the lowest is 2. The mean difference of 0.44 revealed that there is a difference in the performance of the students after being exposed to the Language games. The post-test scores are more spread as compared to the pre-test.

The findings reveal that the scores of students in the post-test are higher than the pre-test. The t-value, which is 3.43, reveals a significant difference at .01 level signifies that the scores of the students before and after using the language games differ significantly. As a result, the computed value is higher than the critical value and therefore, the null hypothesis posited in the study is rejected. Hence, the language games used in this study are valid.

Table 4: Frequency and Weighted Mean Distribution of the Responses As to Text

STATEMENTS	4	3	2	1	WM	VI
1.Contain a lot of information	18	28	4	0	3.28	A
2.Is readable, can be read for a long time	12	30	8	0	3.08	A
3.Easy to print out	15	30	5	0	3.20	A
4.Has readable front styles and color that are used	14	31	5	0	3.18	A
Average Weighted Mean					3.19	A

Table 4 shows the frequency and weighted mean distribution of the responses as to text. Statement 1 obtained the highest weighted mean of 3.28 falling in the acceptable category while statement 2 got the lowest weighted mean of 3.08 with an acceptable rating. The respondents agreed that the games used contain lot of information relevant to the lesson. The average weighted mean is 3.19 with an acceptable rating.

This connotes that the respondents considered the text of the material as properly presented based on their responses. It further reveals that the text of the material has certain qualities such as readability, and easy to print out.

Table 5: Frequency and Weighted Mean Distribution of the Responses As to Pictures/ Images

STATEMENTS	4	3	2	1	WM	VI
1.Presents pictures and images that are attractive	11	37	2	0	3.18	A
2. Contains images that are worth a thousand words	13	27	10	0	3.06	A
3.Uses appropriate graphics that are necessary.	12	30	8	0	3.08	A
Average Weighted Mean					3.11	A

Table 5 presents Frequency and Weighted Mean Distribution of the Responses as to Pictures/ Images in the developed games activities among the students. The findings reveal that the pictures and images presented were perceived to be Moderately Acceptable with a mean of 3.18. Pictures and images included in the games must be worth a thousand words gained a mean of 3.06. Uses appropriate graphics got a mean of 3.08. The Average Weighted Mean is 3.11 with an acceptable rating.

The findings imply that teacher should create games using appropriate pictures and images. It is very important for the teachers to know how to use pictures and images that can help students get the meaning of the vocabulary easily.

Table 6: Frequency and Weighted Mean Distribution of the Responses As to Animation

STATEMENTS	4	3	2	1	WM	VI
1. Use animations that are relevant to the lesson being presented.	13	22	15	0	2.96	A
2. Present color animation and designs	9	37	4	0	3.10	A
3. Present animation that are interesting	43	5	2	0	3.82	HA
4. Present animations that are different from other instructional materials	23	25	2	0	3.42	A
Average Weighted Mean					3.33	A

Table 6 shows Frequency and Weighted Mean Distribution of the Responses as to Animation of the developed games activities among the students. The finding revealed that the animations used are relevant to the lesson being presented. It got a weighted mean of 2.96 that falls in the acceptable category. Present color animation and designs obtained a weighted mean of 3.1. Present animation, which is interesting, has a mean of 3.82. Games present animations that are different from other instructional materials got a weighted mean of 3.42. Statement 3 got the highest weighted of 3.82 falling in the highly acceptable category. The Average Weighted Mean is 3.33 described as acceptable. It means that the animations used are appealing to the students.

The findings imply that teachers need to use appropriate animation, which are suitable to the lesson. They must be interesting and it is very important for the teacher to choose the animations that are different from other instructional materials.

V. Conclusions And Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The research topic was conducted on a small issue but initially pointed out the effectiveness of using games in teaching vocabulary for students at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration. Based on findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The respondents preferred Hangman, Bingo and Crossword as the games used in teaching vocabulary.
- The posttest score of the students using language games is higher than the pre-test scores.
- The use of language games is valid in teaching vocabulary.
- The use of language game activities in teaching vocabulary is generally accepted by the students.

5.2 Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions, the following are recommended:

1. The language game activities can be used as an alternative teaching approach in vocabulary development.
2. Since the study made use only of selected games, other game activities can be utilized in vocabulary development of students.
3. The language games used in this study can be tried out to a bigger number of respondents.

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