



Article Title: Vocabulary teaching techniques (with use of games)

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Abstract: Vocabulary acquisition crucial in any language acquirement, English of course included. However, they are often thought as dull and laborious. And guess what? It really can be. From my research, there has been many an argument t the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching vocabulary.

In this article I would like to compare some traditional techniques of teaching vocabulary with the usage of games. It is my opinion that the combination of the two techniques is most efficient.

Introduction

I am sure students will be enthusiastic about practicing vocabulary through games. After all, games are not only fun but help students learn without conscious analysis. Saying that, I also believe that games work better to reiterate what they have learnt from the traditional techniques than a means on its own.

Vocabulary teaching techniques

A teacher must first ‘teach’ the child/student the meaning/definition/description of the words. In other words, as if a teacher wants students to remember a new vocabulary, they have to make sure students have to understand the word. To achieve that, especially in a beginner’s level, a traditional textbook style teaching might be required. Then, teachers must make sure the new word(s) is better remembered in a “memorable way.” (Hubbard et al. 1983:50)

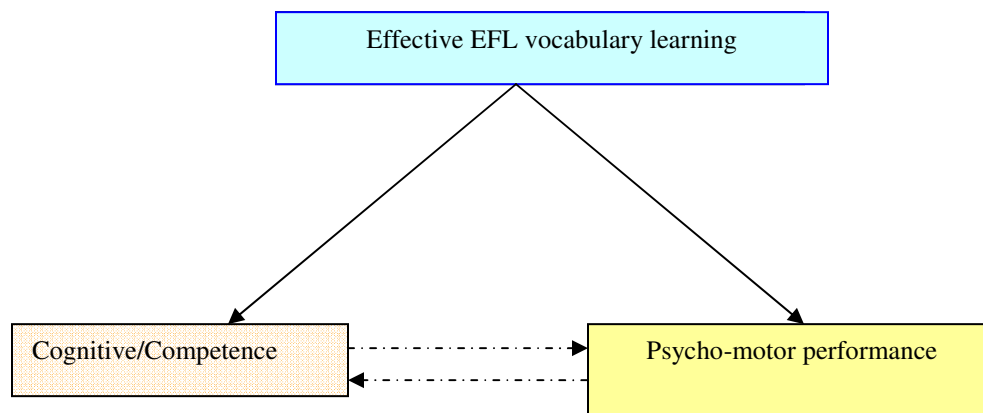
As Haycraft suggests following certain guidelines. These include teaching the vocabulary "in spoken form first" to prevent students from pronouncing the words in the form they are written.

How a student learns

Three domains have been recognized in pedagogy as playing a part in learning:

Cognitive/competence: In language learning, competence refers to the deposit of knowledge and information the student possesses. This would be up to the teacher to teach formally.

Psycho-motor/performance: actual use of the skills. Because it is affective by use, repetition and habit is closely related to the psycho-motor domain.



In effect, without the relation of competence and performance, a student may know how to say a word but not have any idea what it is! That is SCARY!

No part of the diagram should be neglected. For a student to make progress in EFL, he/she should not only absorb information (through traditional teaching and textbook methods) but also the ability to transform what he/she has learnt into a usable form.

Both cognitive and psycho-motor processes play an important one. Thus no part of this triad can be neglected if EFL is to succeed in any part of the world.

Visual techniques pertain to visual memory, which is considered especially helpful with vocabulary retention. Learners remember better the material that has been presented by means of visual aids (Zebrowska 1975:452). Visual techniques lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of vocabulary-nouns; many are also helpful in conveying meanings of verbs and adjectives. They help students associate presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into their system of language values.

The advantages of using games

Many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. W. R. Lee holds that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms (1979:2). He also says that games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching program. I disagree somewhat as this would depend on the level of the students grasp of the

A similar opinion is expressed by Richard-Amato, who believes games to be fun but warns against overlooking their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching. There are many advantages of using games.

"Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely" (Richard-Amato 1988:147). They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (Hansen 1994:118). They also enable learners to acquire new

experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson. Furthermore, to quote Richard-Amato, they, "add diversion to the regular classroom activities," break Lee, W. R. 1979. Language teaching games and contests. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency. If not for any of these reasons, they should be used just because they help students see beauty in a foreign language and not just problems that at times seem overwhelming.

Choosing appropriate games.

There are many factors to consider while discussing games, one of which is appropriacy. Teachers should be very careful about choosing games if they want to make them profitable for the learning process. If games are to bring desired results, they must correspond to either the student's level, or age, or to the material that is to be introduced or practised. Not all games are appropriate for all students irrespective of their age (Siek-Piskozub 1994:37). Different age groups require various topics, materials, and modes of games. For example, children benefit most from games which require moving around, imitating a model, competing between groups and the like (Siek-Piskozub 1994:38). Furthermore, structural games that practise or reinforce a certain grammatical aspect of language have to relate to students' abilities and prior knowledge. Games become difficult when the task or the topic is unsuitable or outside the student's experience.

Another factor influencing the choice of a game is its length and the time necessary for its completion. Many games have a time limit, but according to Siek-Piskozub, the teacher can either allocate more or less time depending on the students' level, the number of people in a group, or the knowledge of the rules of a game etc. (1994:43).

When to use games.

Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. Yet, as 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" (1979:3). Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. Rixon suggests that games be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. At

different stages of the lesson, the teacher's aims connected with a game may vary:

Presentation. Provide a good model making its meaning clear;

Controlled practise. Elicit good imitation of new language and appropriate responses;

Communicative practice. Give students a chance to use the language (1981:70).

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. However, can they be more successful for presentation and revision than other techniques? Mt thought that it is more successful for revision rather than anything else.

Many sources referred to in this article emphasize the importance of vocabulary revision. This process aims at helping students acquire active, productive vocabularies. Students need to practice regularly what they have learnt; otherwise, the material will fade away. Teachers can resort to many techniques for vocabulary consolidation and revision.

To begin with, a choice of graphs and grids can be used. Students may give a definition of a given item to be found by other students. Multiple choice and gap filling exercises will activate the vocabulary while students select the appropriate response.

There is also a large variety of word games that are "useful for practicing and revising vocabulary after it has been introduced" (Haycraft 1978:50). Numerous puzzles, word squares, crosswords, etc., are useful especially for pair or group work.

My game lesson plan

The game I propose is called random cards. It is an adaptation of find a card game and at www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/1979/games.html.

Name of game: Find a Card

Aim: To assess that students have understood the vocabulary they have learnt through traditional teaching

Description of game:

As repeated numerous times in this article, I believe vocabulary revision game is a very effective way of assessing your students' understanding of the new vocabularies you have introduced in your class.

The day after the 'traditional' vocabulary lesson, I will throw pictures of nouns and even verbs (actions such as shaking hands etc) i.e. vocabulary words randomly on the floor) faced down) of the class before my students come in. On the walls around the class (if space allows) or on the black/white boards will be the definitions of the pictures.

Children being curious will want to touch and see the cards but I will be insistent that they not so much out a foot in the card. This will increase their level of curiosity.

To begin the game, I will call a student out to pick a picture card nearest to him. He will then need to match it to the definition that is either on the class walls or on the black/white board and stick it next to it. There will be a penalty of having to pick another card should he get it wrong.

I will then call another student to do the same. After that, I will allow the students to take charge, picking their friend to do the task..

Depending on the number of vocabularies the students have learnt in the traditional sense, this game may take anywhere from 15 minutes to a whole class.

Homework for the day is to write grammatically correct sentences using at least 5 of the vocabularies from the game.

Conclusion

Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication. Teachers should be encouraged to find other games which are suitable for his/her students or develop his/her own.

Citations

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