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## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMES AND SONGS IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS AT INTERNATIONAL KNOWLEDGE SCHOOL IN MISURATA

\*Fatima Ismail Mahmoud alamin

Libya.

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\*Corresponding Author: Fatima Ismail Mahmoud alamin

Libya.

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching vocabulary to young learners in Libya remains a challenging process, particularly due to the need for selecting appropriate and meaningful vocabulary that suits learners' age and cognitive level. To facilitate effective language learning, EFL teachers are required to employ innovative techniques in teaching vocabulary in the classrooms. This study highlights the use of games and songs as instructional techniques for teaching English vocabulary to kindergarten learners. To answer the research questions, a pre-test and post-test were administered to KG1 and KG2 students at International Knowledge School in Misurata. The findings reveal that both games and songs contribute positively to vocabulary learning; however, games were found to be slightly more effective in enhancing students' vocabulary recognition and motivation. The results suggest that incorporating interactive and enjoyable activities such as games and songs can significantly support vocabulary acquisition among young learners and help achieve the objectives of teaching English vocabulary at the kindergarten level.

**KEYWORDS:** young learners, kindergarten students, games, songs, vocabulary.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, teaching English become increasingly prominent in Libya, particularly among young learners. English is now taught as a core subject in many kindergarten and elementary schools, which places greater responsibility on teachers to adopt effective and age-appropriate teaching methods. Teaching young learners differs significantly

from teaching adults, as children tends to have shorter attention and require stimulation. According to Harmer (2008), teachers of young learners should spend plenty of time examining and understanding how their students operate and think. Teaching young learners is very difficult compared with teaching adults as young learners get distracted very fast. Harmer (2008) stated that young children learn differently from older children, adolescents, and adult. Children love to have fun and play, so teachers should choose suitable teaching methods that supply children's nature. In other words, the teacher should be innovative in selecting the tools, techniques or activities in the learning process. Games and songs are one of the methods that could be used in order to avoid boredom in the classroom as they have a special role in any foreign language teaching. Furthermore, teachers may achieve all the educational outcomes through applying the use of games and songs especially in teaching vocabulary. Based on Harmer (2008), language structure is considered "the skeleton of the language," it agreed that vocabulary is "the vital organs and flesh". Vocabulary is one of the fundamental parts to learn any language. Teaching vocabulary through the use of games and songs has become crucially important for English language learners because they uphold enjoyment and interest in learning and support using the language in a full of courage and innovative manner. The reason for conducting this study is the increasing need for child-centered and interactive instructional strategies that effectively support vocabulary acquisition among kindergarten learners in EFL contexts such as Libya. Traditional teaching approaches may not adequately address young learners' cognitive development, limited literacy skills, or need for physical movement and engagement. Therefore, there is a strong pedagogical demand for teaching techniques that promote motivation, enjoyment, and meaningful learning, such as games and songs, which are widely recognized as effective tools in early language education (Harmer, 2008; Millington, 2011).

Overall, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of research on teaching English to young learners by examining interactive and age-appropriate vocabulary teaching techniques within a Libyan kindergarten context. The findings are expected to support teachers in making informed pedagogical decisions and adopting effective instructional strategies that enhance vocabulary learning among kindergarten students.

## **Literature Review**

Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well young learners speak, listen, read, and write (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The age

range of 1 to 5 years is a period of rapid development of children's ability to speak, including the addition of vocabulary, mastery of word pronunciation, and combining sentences. As a child learns new words and meanings daily, his vocabulary mastery will rapidly improve. (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021). In the following section, teaching a foreign language to KG students, teaching vocabulary to KG students, using games and songs in teaching vocabulary to KG students will be explained in this section.

**Teaching a Foreign Language to KG Students:** Learning a language at a younger age is better in terms of pronunciation and exposure to speaking; it will allow them to speak more fluently and make them sound more native-like. In general, it is agreed upon that they learn languages better than adults because children have more time for learning, and do not have any worries or responsibilities. Also, they are better at learning any language when they are exposed to it naturally for a long-term. Cameron (2001) stated that there are four things teachers need to keep in mind while teaching English to young learners beside knowledge and skills. Teachers must be conscious of how their students learn and think. Also, they must be able to find out what children are interested in and utilize it for language teaching. In addition, teachers should be equipped to teach their young student literacy in English and deliver the whole lesson orally. Last, but not least, teacher should identify problems and difficulties while teaching the language. According to Brown (2001), teachers must take into consideration the characteristics (e.g learn indirectly rather than directly) and intellectuality of their young learners in order to be successful in learning the language. According to Robin (2001), it is necessary to consider specific characteristics of young learners, young children have an innate capacity to absorb a new language like a sponge. They imitate their role models with excitement and spontaneity. Also, young children actively learn the language through games, songs, stories, projects and other activities.

**Teaching Vocabulary to KG Students:** In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing all together (Nguyen and Khuat, 2003). 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. Words are the basic unit of language form. Without sufficient vocabulary, one cannot communicate effectively or express ideas. Having limited vocabulary is also a barrier that prevents students from learning a foreign language. If learners do not know how to expand their vocabulary, they gradually lose interest in learning (Barska, 2006).

Vocabulary has been seen as a major resource for language use. Early foreign language learning offers the chance for learners to build up a solid core of words useful for further learning, together with words that are learnt because they interest or excite young learners at that age (Cameron, 2001:94). If we are to increase the vocabulary knowledge of children, there must be an ongoing effort to introduce and explain new vocabulary, starting from kindergarten. The activities for very young learners are based on the theory that very young children acquire language by watching, listening, doing things, and imitating. In other words, vocabulary acquisition takes place through active learning. One way that very young children absorb information is by looking at things. Thus, visual aids play a major role in the activities. They are used to establish and clarify meaning, provide an immediate memory association, and assist in the recall of words and phrases (Slattery, 2005).

**Using Games in Teaching Vocabulary to KG Students:** Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they have to speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information (Wright, Betteridge and Buckby 2005:1). If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire. Games are often associated with fun. While it is true that games are usually fun, one must not lose sight of their pedagogical value, particularly in second and foreign language teaching. Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely. Games are sometimes used in classrooms to develop and reinforce concepts (e.g., colors, shapes, numbers, word definitions, to add diversion to the regular classroom activities, and even to break the ice.

Bearing in mind that communication is the ultimate goal of learning a language, then acquiring, remembering, and meaningfully using newly learnt words is an essential part of learning a foreign language. Students learning a foreign language most of the time tend to forget or misuse new words. This (forgetting and misusing) is due to many factors, the most important of which are words are not properly stored in students' minds, they are not practiced enough and they are not related to students' own experiences and interests. Among the many ways of making learning more effective, games are thought as useful tools for such comprehension.

On the top of that, there are many factors to consider while discussing games, one of which is the appropriacy. In order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is important that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and classroom settings are factors that should be taken into considerations (Sari, 2006). Games contribute to vocabulary learning if they give students a chance to learn, practice and to review the English language in a pleasant atmosphere. They 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 and communicative way (Nguyen and Khatu, 2003). Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied.

### **Using Songs in Teaching Vocabulary to KG Students**

Songs play a significant role in motivating students to learn English. They can support the development of learners' abilities in reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as provide opportunities for learning pronunciation, rhythm, grammar and vocabulary. The song's words and rhyme are exciting and enjoyable for students because many things can be taught to Kindergarten students through songs that will stay with them throughout their lives (Mokhtar et al., 2017). The use of song will allow students to develop themselves and their feelings, and it can also help students make sense of and solve problems, (Hadi, 2019). According Hadi, (2019), using songs as a teaching tool has its benefits; songs can change the classroom atmosphere. In addition, using songs can create a relaxed and comfortable environment for students while also helping them develop their language skills. For young children, singing is a fun activity, undoubtedly, songs as a technique are fun activities that can be used to help students learn a language. They do not put students under any pressure to produce a language immediately but rather wait until they are ready. English lyrics can be used as a technique to introduce vocabulary to solve problems. This technique increases student motivation, especially in creating a pleasant learning environment.

Singing activities are one of the innovative teaching techniques and English learning aids for early childhood (Fridayanti et al., 2021). When students feel more enthusiastic and

comfortable discussing vocabulary, their confidence and interest in learning increase significantly, it makes it easier for them to remember vocabulary (Fridayanti et al., 2021). Songs are regarded as one of the most influential media for vocabulary acquisition (Anggaira et al., 2022). Before using songs to teach vocabulary to young learners, the songs should have a happy vibe and be related to learning activities. The teaching and learning process is simply a failure without the proper method and media, that is why this study focuses on the use of song media in teaching English vocabulary, particularly to kindergarten students.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

In this study, a pre and post-tests were used as data collection instruments. The purpose of the pre-test was to decide the baselines of the students and the purpose of the post-test was to understand to what extent the students had achieved the intended goals. The pre and post-tests were the same tests to reach reliable and valid results. As the students cannot read and write, the tests were carried out by a "*point to .....*" test during the implementation process. The use of identical pre-tests and post-tests, along with consistent instructional procedures across both groups, enhanced the reliability and internal validity of the study.

### **Setting and Participants**

The participants of the study were chosen randomly from KG classes. They were 40 students from the International Knowledge School in Misurata. The students were at the age of 3 to 5 and they were pre-school students. The study took place in 2024 first semester. There were two groups; Group A studied the selected vocabulary items through games whereas group B studied the selected vocabulary items through songs. Each group consisted of 20 students. The study had aimed at finding out which way was more effective in terms of teaching vocabulary to kindergarten students.

### **Process**

This study employed a quasi-experimental comparative design to examine the effectiveness of games or songs in teaching English vocabulary to kindergarten learners (Creswell, 2014). The instructional process was conducted through structured sessions designed for each group, focusing on two vocabulary themes: colors and jobs. To minimize instructional bias, all teaching sessions for both groups were conducted by the same teacher following the same instructional duration and classroom condition (Creswell, 2014). All instructional activities were designed to address young learners' multisensory learning needs by integrating visual,

auditory, and kinesthetic elements, which are considered essential for effective language learning in early childhood education (Cameron, 2001).

### **Group A (Games – Colors)**

**Session 1:** The first session began with the administration of a pre-test. The students were asked to respond to a "point to..." task using colorful flashcards displayed on the classroom board. The flashcards represented colors (red, brown, yellow, green, blue, white, and black) and jobs (tailor, doctor, farmer, chef, teacher, artist, and fireman). The results of the pre-test indicated that the students were unable to correctly identify the target vocabulary items, suggesting that they had not been previously exposed to these words.

Following the pre-test, an art-and-craft activity was conducted as a warm-up activity. Students were given cardboard crowns and paper pencils with partially colored sections. They were asked to complete the coloring task and attach the pencils to their crowns. This activity aimed to develop fine motor skills and create a relaxed and engaging classroom atmosphere.

The main activity involved a game known as "Twister." A large plastic mat containing rows of colored circles was placed on the classroom floor. The teacher instructed students to touch specific colors using their hands or feet. Students who lost balance or touched the mat with their knees or elbows were eliminated. This game allowed students to repeatedly hear, recognize, and physically respond to the target vocabulary, addressing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles.

### **Group B (Songs – Colors)**

**Session 1:** for Group B also began with the same pre-test administered to Group A. The results revealed that the students were similarly unable to identify the target colors, confirming the homogeneity of the two groups.

The same art-and-craft activity used with Group A was applied to Group B to ensure reliability and validity. The students wore the colored crowns while participating in the singing activity.

The song was first performed by the teacher and then repeated by the students collectively. While singing, students followed physical commands embedded in the song, such as standing up, turning around, and sitting down, according to the colors displayed on their crowns. Drama and physical movement were incorporated to reinforce vocabulary learning through action.

### **Group A (Games – Jobs)**

**Session 2:** focused on teaching job-related vocabulary through games. As a pre-activity, students were given envelopes containing pictures of tools and objects associated with different professions (e.g., books, scissors, hammer, fire hose). Students colored the materials and hung them around their necks.

During the game, pictures representing different jobs were placed around the classroom. The teacher named a profession, and students holding the corresponding object ran toward the matching job picture. The first student to reach the correct picture was declared the winner. This activity encouraged movement, matching, and vocabulary recognition through visual and kinesthetic engagement.

A post-test was administered after the game using the same "point to..." task as the pre-test. The results showed that 15 out of 20 students were able to correctly identify the vocabulary items, indicating successful vocabulary recognition.

### **Group B (Songs – Jobs)**

**Session 2:** for Group B followed the same structure as Group A. The same art-and-craft activity was conducted to maintain consistency across groups. Students wore the job-related pictures while participating in the singing activity.

The teacher introduced a job-related song by singing it first, followed by group repetition. The song included repetitive question and answer patterns and descriptive verses related to different professions. Students performed actions and gestures while singing, which supported vocabulary recognition through repetition and movement.

After the singing activity, a post-test identical to the pre-test was administered. The results showed that 13 out of 20 students were able to correctly identify the target vocabulary items, indicating vocabulary learning at the recognition level.

## **CONCLUSION**

Introducing English to children at an early age gives them a chance to expand their horizons and arouse their early excitement and curiosity about languages. This enthusiasm and thirst for learning can be extended with active teaching methods that focus on learning the language through play and discovery. Focus should also be on learning the language for interaction and communication (Lefever, 2007). With all these factors in place, introducing language learning at an early age can result in children's increased self-confidence, joy of learning and

active participation in the larger society. Also, using songs can help children learn vocabulary. The activities for very young learners should be within the capabilities of young learners. The activities for very young learners teach vocabulary through play and movement, whereas those for young learners involve a greater degree of participatory learning (Slattery, 2005). An overwhelming majority of pupils find games relaxing and motivating. Games should be an integral part of a lesson, providing the possibility of intensive practice while at the same time immensely enjoyable for both students and teachers. Games are proven to be useful and effective in our study that they should be used for teaching vocabulary to very young learners. Thus, such a teaching method will help the students actively involved in the process in an enjoyable way.

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