

THE IMPACT OF MOTIVATION ON VOCABULARY LEARNING

TRAN QUOC TUAN*

ABSTRACT

This article investigated the impact of motivation, enhanced by games, on students' vocabulary learning examined via their performance and attitude. Its effectiveness was clarified in an empirical study. Its findings contributed to students' vocabulary improvement and a change in their attitudes towards lexical learning.

Key words: motivation, game, performance, and attitude.

TÓM TẮT

Ảnh hưởng của động cơ đối với việc học từ vựng

Bài báo khảo sát sự ảnh hưởng của động cơ, tác động bởi trò chơi, lên việc học từ vựng thông qua thái độ và khả năng thể hiện của học sinh. Tính hiệu quả của nó được đánh giá qua nghiên cứu thực nghiệm. Kết quả nghiên cứu góp phần cải thiện việc học từ vựng của học sinh và làm thay đổi thái độ của họ đối với việc học từ vựng.

Từ khóa: động cơ, trò chơi, khả năng thể hiện, và thái độ.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, learning English becomes a need and brings about employment and learning chances for someone proficient in English. Possessing one of such certificates as TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC, students can have great advantages in finding good jobs because “almost all jobs require a certificate in English” [8, p.7]. However, not all students are successful in their English learning because “their basic English knowledge still remains problematic and does not meet real demands” [6, p. 1]. One of the main reasons for this problem is the inadequate lexis, which prevents students from their language skill development.

To overcome this problem, the researcher begins to look for and apply appropriate games to enhance students' motivation so that they can learn lexis effectively. Up to now, there have been many studies on using games in teaching and learning vocabulary such as those by [4], [7], [5], and [3]. However, these researchers have not studied and emphasized the use of games to enhance students' motivation in vocabulary learning yet. As such, it is necessary to consider that issue its main focus in the research process via the following primary research question:

To what extent can games enhance students' motivation in vocabulary learning?

To answer this main research question, an understanding of students' lexical performance after the treatment of games as well as their effect on the learner attitude

* MSc, Ton Duc Thang University; Email: tranquoctuan78_gc@yahoo.com

in vocabulary learning is necessary. Consequently, the two following sub-questions should be addressed before the main question can be answered.

1. What is students' lexical performance under the treatment of games – a factor enhancing their motivation?
2. What is their attitude towards the use of games in lexical learning?

This study provides teachers with knowledge of some kinds of game and gives them fundamental instructions in dealing with teaching vocabulary. It also supplies guidelines for students to enhance their motivation in learning lexis effectively. Thus it contributes to their improvement of vocabulary performance and lexical learning attitude, and further their language skill development.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Participants and instruments

Participants in this study were 80 students of the 11th grade at Nguyen Van Con High School, which is located in Go Cong Dong District, Tien Giang Province. They were from two classes 11₄, treated as the experimental group (EG), and 11₈, as the controlled group (CG), that the researcher was conveniently assigned by the Principal to teach in the first semester of the school year 2009 – 2010 respectively.

The instruments of the study were two tests and a questionnaire. Before the experiment started, the pretest was delivered to both groups to identify their prior lexical knowledge via their scores. After two months, the posttest was used to check students' lexical performance. The questionnaire was also used to collect data on students' attitude towards the use of games in their motivation enhancement in lexical learning. Its questions included four choices coded according to Likert scale.

2.2. Analytical framework

2.2.1. Pretest and Posttest

The quantitative analysis was used for the pre- and post-test results obtained from two groups. It supplied the researcher himself with the values of mean, standard deviation, range of scores, and frequency of these tests.

Next, “the independent t-test” [1, p. 152] was employed to identify whether the average scores of the pre-and post-tests were statistically significant or not. To do that, the observed t value was calculated and compared with the critical t one suggested by Fisher and Yates (1963), as cited in [1, p. 153]. The researcher based himself on a two-tailed decision converted by Statistic Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 13.0 and set the acceptance level at .05.

2.2.2. Questionnaire

All questions in the questionnaire were quantitatively analyzed via the descriptive statistics with the assistance of SPSS 13.0 in which the percentage and raw counts were calculated and presented in tables and charts.

3. Data analysis and discussion of findings

Data analysis primarily focuses on two tests and a questionnaire.

3.1. Test results

The section includes the analysis of pre- and post-test scores in order to see students' lexical knowledge before and after the experiment.

3.1.1. Pretest results

The pretest's results of both groups were summarized below.

Table 1. Pretest score data of the EG and the CG

Mean		Standard Deviation		Range of scores		Frequency	
E.G	C.G	E.G	C.G	E.G	C.G	E.G	C.G
4.9750	4.9875	.84694	.79653	4.0	4.0	8	5
				4.5	4.5	11	15
				5.0	5.0	10	8
				5.5	5.5	3	6
				6.0	6.0	4	2
				6.5	6.5	2	2
				7.0	7.0	2	2
				Total		40	40

It was found that the average scores of these groups seemed to be equivalent to each other. More exactly, their disparity of -0.0125 was very small, and they also had a same score distribution in which the minimum value was 4.0 and the maximum one was 7.0. What is more, the most frequently obtained mark was 4.5.

Additionally, the result of the t -test_{pre} reveals that the observed t value was -0.068 , whose absolute value was compared with the corresponding critical t one with d.f. of 78. Unluckily, there was no value stated at this d.f. (see Fisher and Yates, 1963, as cited in [1, p. 153]). Accordingly, the researcher chose the number at d.f. of 60 as the conservative estimate value. Then, he checked cross to the .05 column and found that the critical t one for Sig. (2-tailed) was 2.000, which was much greater than 0.068. Therefore, it can be proved that there was no significant difference between two means of both groups. Inferentially, there was a similarity in lexical knowledge between the EG and the CG before the treatment of games.

3.1.2. Posttest results

As seen in Tables 2, there was an obvious difference among the students' posttest scores of the two groups at the end of the experiment. The mean of the EG was higher than that of the CG, about 0.8375. Besides, the range of the first group was wider than that of the second one. Especially, the most prominent points in the former were 6.0 and 6.5 while the most frequent mark in the latter was only 5.0.

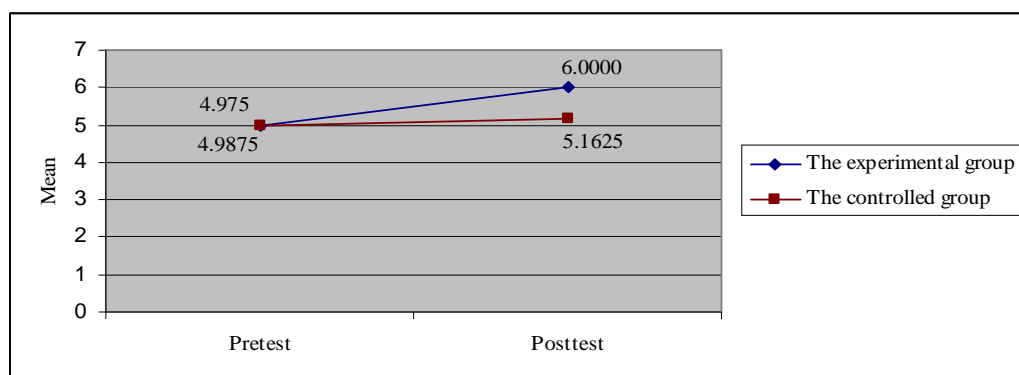
Table 2. Posttest score data of the EG and the CG

Mean		Standard Deviation		Range of scores		Frequency	
E.G	C.G	E.G	C.G	E.G	C.G	E.G	C.G
6.0	5.1625	0.93370	.89434	4.0	4.0	0	7
				4.5	4.5	4	5
				5.0	5.0	6	12
				5.5	5.5	6	9
				6.0	6.0	8	3
				6.5	6.5	7	1
				7.0	7.0	5	1
				7.5	7.5	3	2
				8.0	8.0	1	0
				Total		40	40

Furthermore, the result showed that the observed t value in this case was 4.097, which was twice as high as the critical one of only 2.000, recommended by Fisher and Yates (1963, as cited in [1, p. 153]) at d.f of 60. Therefore, it was quite safe to say that the disparity between the two means was statistically significant. This consolidated a belief of the game use in the enhancement of student motivation in lexical learning, at least in the aspect of their vocabulary performance.

3.1.3. Comparison of pre- and post-test results of the two groups

To recognize the change before and after the application of games in lexical learning apparently, a comparison of the pre- and post-test means of the two groups cannot be ignored. Figure 3 supplies us with this change.

*Figure 3. Changes in pre- and post-test means of the two groups*

As seen in the figure above with regard to the average scores of the CG only, there was a slight increase of 0.175 from 4.9875 to 5.1625. This change was not the result of the game treatment but was that of the students' natural vocabulary development in the learning process. Meanwhile, there was a considerable difference of 1.025 in the average score between the two means of the pre- and post-tests in the EG. It varied notably from a rather low mean of 4.975 to a rather good one of 6.0. Its result reflected the effectiveness of games on the enhancement of student performance in vocabulary learning.

3.2. Questionnaire results

This section continues discussing the results of the questionnaire in terms of the students' attitude in lexical learning examined through the enhancement of their motivation, language practice chances and cooperative learning, and some possible difficulties of introducing games into class.

3.2.1. Enhancement of student motivation

With their attractive features, games can really enhance student motivation in vocabulary learning. Most students (93.7%) recognized that games could make the classroom atmosphere vivid. Therefore, 91.2% believed that games could maintain their motivation in vocabulary learning. With such advantageous conditions, games really brought comfort instead of boredom to students when they were used in class. This idea was supported by 93.7% of the students.

Besides, learning lexis with games could reduce students' anxiety when they participated in classroom activities. Seeing such a positive effect, 91.2% showed their approval of this point. Moreover, games helped students renew their energy before they returned to more formal learning, and agreed by 96.3% of the learners.

3.2.2. Language practice chances

The application of games in lexical teaching and learning also brought about other benefits. One of those was the creativeness of chances for language practice. Particularly, games could increase student-talking time, which was approved by 87.5% of the students. They also allowed learners to use the target language frequently in class, shared by 90% of the learners. In addition, games provided learners with chances for language practice and skill development. The result showed that most of the students (92.5%) voted for this issue. Finally, games helped shy learners participate in activities frequently, agreed by 85.0%.

3.2.3. Cooperative learning

Aside from the previously presented positive impacts, games prompted cooperative learning among members in groups or teams, where the weak received help from the good. This benefit was elevated when it was supported by 90% of the students.

As such, games had great effects on students' lexical learning in terms of the enhancement of their motivation, the creativeness of language practice chances, and the

facilitation for cooperative learning. Regardless of these remarkable points, they had some problematic matters that are mentioned in the next section.

3.2.4. Possible difficulties of game introduction

In spite of having the positive effect, games reveal some difficulties when introduced into the classroom. The first common problem making students confused was unclear rules, which was supported by 92.5% of the students. The second one is that games became hard for students with limited vocabulary knowledge. This was agreed by 91.3%, more seriously, they could not express their idea in the target language. Therefore, the elimination of the native language in class was not simple. The third one is that they often took much time to play games in large classes, and shared by 95.0%. The reality shows that the average number of students in each class at most high schools is 40 or above. From that, the use of games in such crowded classes was really difficult, and this was approved by 91.2% of the students.

In brief, the results obtaining from questionnaire analysis once more confirmed a fact that games had great effects on students' vocabulary learning attitude identified in three aspects: (1) games could enhance students' motivation in lexical learning, (2) they could create chances for language practice, and (3) they prompted the cooperative learning among learners. However, there still existed some problematic issues related to the unclear rules, students' inadequate lexis, and time waste.

3.3. Discussion of findings

From data analysis above, the researcher discovered some issues related to students' performance and attitude on lexical learning.

3.3.1. For students' lexical performance

Via the pretest scores, the researcher saw that both the EG and the CG were initially bad at lexical performance. Most of their students obtained from bad to average scores. Notably, the t -test_{pre} unveiled that there was almost no significant difference between their means. It could be said that the students in these two groups similarly shared rather low vocabulary knowledge.

Although the pretest scores of the EG were similar to those of the CG, its posttest ones showed a positive tendency towards progress. Particularly, its percentage of the students gaining fairly good points increased quickly. The result was that the mean of the former was higher than that of the latter. More importantly, the t -test_{post} showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the two means. Inferentially, lexical knowledge of the EG was much improved due to the effectiveness of the game treatment rather than chance.

3.3.2. *For students' attitude on vocabulary learning*

3.3.2.1. *Positive aspects*

After games had been instructed in class, most students changed their viewpoint on lexical learning. They saw the positive impact of games on their motivation enhancement. Therefore, they felt at ease to learn words and highly evaluated the effectiveness of games for their remembrance of words thanks to enjoyment, fun, and relaxation that games brought about. Spontaneously, games helped them regain energy before they returned to more formal learning.

Besides, most students knew that games created chances for language practice. They realized that playing games in class was not simply for amusement and relaxation, but games themselves brought about many opportunities for drilling the target language frequently, which helped their word stock broaden considerably.

Finally, many students recognized that games stimulated a cooperative learning among learners via pairs and groups and shared ideas in order to find out the answer to the common problem. Remarkably, they had a good chance to learn from each other and improved their lexical knowledge.

3.3.2.2. *Negative aspects*

Apart from the positive influence above, there were still some problematic issues when games were played in class. Most students admitted that unclear instructions of games caused them confused and took them much time to play games in class. Games also became hard for those having lexical limitation because they could not express their opinions in the target language. This forced them to use the mother tongue in their discussion.

Despite their drawbacks partly affecting students' lexical learning, generally speaking, games were worth paying more attention to enhancing student motivation. They contributed to improving learners' lexical performance and making them change their attitude towards the vocabulary learning favorably.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

This research has been implemented to examine the educational value of motivation, enhanced by games, on *students' performance* and *attitude* towards vocabulary learning. Specifically, it has been prompted by the answer to the main research question and its two sub-ones.

The findings in previous part indicate that games can be applied to enhance students' motivation in the aspects of the students' performance and attitude in learning vocabulary. They have shown their high feasibility in this process. They make the learning process occur naturally and vividly and prompt students to use new words frequently in communication, towards retaining lexis more easily and longer. In

addition, they meet students' requirements in the lexical improvement and, further, in the language skill development. Accordingly, it can be said that games are good for enhancing students' motivation in vocabulary learning.

However, using games, according to most students, still revealed some difficulties that derived from their unclear instructions and the students' inadequate vocabulary knowledge. The result was that students used the mother tongue and sometimes made noise in class, which was hardly eliminated. They also indicated that games became ineffective for large classes because they were time-consuming.

In conclusion, games were considered as a good factor for enhancing students' motivation in vocabulary learning. Therefore, it is time they should be used frequently in lexical teaching and learning despite their minor shortcomings.

4.2. Recommendations for lexical teaching and learning

4.2.1. For teachers

To enhance student motivation in lexical learning, teachers should choose and adapt games suitable for real classroom conditions. The following are some guidelines for setting up and using games in class:

- 1 Choose and adjust games appropriately for the learning topic in advance.
- 2 Give clear instructions on the nature and purpose of the game and timing for playing it. Keep them short and simple via gesture, mime, or visuals.
- 3 Use names or numbers to reinforce students' understanding of intended groupings and show the physical organization if necessary.
- 4 Demonstrate how the game works in practice.
- 5 Check students' understanding before they start the activity.
- 6 Elicit what students know, encourage them to guess the answer to the issue, brainstorm new words, and even supply them some key words if necessary.
- 7 Do not interrupt students to correct their mistakes while they are playing games.
- 8 Play a role of an organizer, a controller, an information collector, a counselor, an observer, or even a participant when games are conducted.
- 9 Give feedback to students' performance and correct their serious mistakes.
- 10 Evaluate what students have or have not gained in the game so that they try in some times later.

Depending on each stage of the lesson, teachers can use different kinds of game. They even introduce the same game in various stages provided that it is appropriate for the lesson contents. Normally, games are used to review vocabulary, brainstorm lexis for a new learning topic, elicit what students know about it and even prompt them to predict the answers related to their lesson contents.

4.2.2. For students

For students, vocabulary plays an important role in English learning, especially in skill development. To improve their lexical knowledge, games can be regarded as an important factor in their motivation enhancement. They prompt them to use the target language frequently in their communication and retain new words. Thus, before playing a game, students need to know its aim, requirements, and timing clearly. This can help them avoid unexpected problems such as breaking rules, getting out of the learning topic, and even doing their private things in class. If so, students can play games naturally and capture new words efficaciously.

REFERENCES

1. Brown, J. D. (2001), *Using surveys in language programs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Brown, J. D. (2005), *Testing in language programs*, Chicago: McGraw Hill.
3. Huynh, H. H. N. (2007), *Using games to motivate students in learning vocabulary at Tien Giang High School for Gifted Students*. Unpublished M.A thesis. USSH-VNU-HCMC.
4. Leman, A. B. (1998), *The effectiveness of utilizing games in the teaching of vocabulary to lower secondary school students*. Retrieved April 27th, 2009 from http://www.eltrec.ukm.my/ethesis_view.asp?thesis_ID=80
5. Nguyen, V. T. T. (2006), *The use of games in teaching vocabulary*. Unpublished M.A thesis. USSH, VNU-HCMC.
6. Nguyen, M. T. (2009), Education is foundation for nation's growth: President. *Look at Vietnam*. Retrieved October 3rd, 2009 from <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2009/09/education-is-foundation-for-nations-growth-president.html>
7. Nguyen, T. T. H., & Khuat, T. T. N. (2003), Learning vocabulary through games: The effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games. *Asian EFL Journal*, Retrieved April 25th, 2009 from <http://www.telfgames.com/why.html>
8. Phan, L. H. (2005), Towards a critical notion of appropriation of English as an international language. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(3). Retrieved April 18th, 2009 from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/September_05_plh.php

(Received: 16/3/2015; Revised: 18/4/2015; Accepted: 22/7/2015)