

The Use Of Sports Activities To Enrich Students' Vocabulary In English As A Foreign Language

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Abstract

Sport activities play important role in the lives of students. Practicing sport activities motivate them to excel even more and to be successful students. A number of studies showed that the students of English as a first foreign language in Egypt are not able to communicate verbally through language. They cannot do that because of the lack of vocabulary. Besides, the vocabulary is not the subject of a systematic learning in the classroom. The teachers consider it as a supplement in learning and give little or no consideration to the acquisition of vocabulary. It therefore seems worthwhile to undertake further study to enrich the vocabulary of the students in English through practicing sport activities. The study was limited to four sports: basketball, volleyball, football and tennis of table. These four competitions focus on learning vocabulary. The vocabulary knowledge was measured by a test administered to 60 students at the beginning and at the end of the four week of study. The lexical items on the test were selected from terms that are used widely across the four games. The students were divided randomly and evenly into two groups: control group and experimental group. A comparison of the two group's results suggests a trend toward the effectiveness of practicing sport activities as a method that helps acquire foreign language vocabulary. Practicing sport activities approved a positive and profound effect in vocabulary enrichment. Authors suggest that incorporating sports activities into student learning can improve student vocabulary learning by increasing word acquisition at students.

Key Words

Importance of teaching vocabulary, Second language acquisition, Practicing sports, attracting students' attention, Sports and communication

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A. Introduction

Language plays different important roles as it helps the students to express their ideas and feelings and to understand the different meanings of the word. English is taught as a second language that comes after Arabic and which is to be learned by students in both public and private education in our country. It is included in the curriculum as a compulsory subject for the Junior and Senior High School. While, for students in some Elementary School, though English is given only as a local subject, it has an important role in preparing the students to continue their study to the next stages of education. Therefore, it is important to introduce the students in elementary school to the basics of English which is vocabulary.

Vocabulary is related to words and meanings and it is fundamental for communication and knowledge. Hatch and Brown (1995:1) define vocabulary as a set of words related to a particular language and that the speakers of this language are using. According to them, vocabulary refers to a group of

words used by a person as a means of communication. For Ur (1996: 60), vocabulary refers to words that are used in a foreign language and that do not come from the students' native language, but from a foreign language that the students are learning.

The vocabulary may be composed of two or three words expressing one idea (Widistuti, 2011). However, Moon in Schmitt and McCarthy (1997: 105) has added that traditionally, vocabulary consists not only of single words: lexemes are often made up of strings of more than one word. Finally, Widistuti has concluded that vocabulary is a set of words that are taught in foreign language and which the speaker uses to express his ideas (2011). Vocabulary is important for the four learning skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is also vital for learning and understanding a second language. Both Coady and Huckin (1997: 5) concluded that vocabulary is the most important point for the learner of a new language to be able to acquire it easily.

Researchers have confirmed that learning vocabulary is more fundamental than learning grammar. Thornburry (2002: 13) stated that unlike grammar without which very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed at all. It is not important for the student to learn grammar or sounds of language, but it is extremely important to learn vocabulary. Vocabulary is also important for the individual to express his ideas. A good vocabulary means choosing the right words to communicate in addition to spelling them correctly (Allen, 1983: 5).

Furthermore, Rivers in Nunan (1991: 117) states that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, we will be unable to use the structures and functions that we may have learned for comprehensible communication. It means that vocabulary will give an important element in the acquisition of second language. Thus, we can conclude that vocabulary plays a fundamental role in language communication and it is the

first step for learning any language.

Today, it is a vital matter to have knowledge of more than one language. Learning a second language improves one's written and spoken language. In addition, learning different languages is fundamental for the job market as it opens different opportunities in life. Starting the process of learning a second language earlier makes it easier to be more fluent in the language one acquires. Therefore, teachers at elementary schools are the persons who know very well the importance of learning a second language. So, it is important to include teachers who are efficient enough at helping the students to gain additional practice in skills through foreign language experiences. According to previous researches (Diaz, Landry, Lopata, Masciantonio, Rafferty), learning foreign language develops the cognitive abilities and skills of the children. In addition, learning a foreign language improves the performance in the first language and develops the ability to communicate in

different language system. (Myriam Met, 1989:62)

There are some problems that the children suffer from during the process of learning a foreign language such as having difficulties in recognizing the words and remembering their meanings in addition to having difficulties in pronouncing the words and writing them. As a reaction to these problems, the students try to escape from the learning environment either by playing with their friends during the learning process, or by asking for permission to go to the toilet, or by not following the lessons with their teachers or by looking sleepy during the classes. Therefore, the best idea is to find out a method that would help to attract the students' attention at the same time of learning the vocabulary of the foreign language. Other previous researches have used different methods such as digital games (Aghlara and Tamjid, 2011) and You Tube (Widiastuti, 2010) to enrich the students' vocabulary. This research suggests enriching the students' vocabulary through practicing sport activities.

Childhood educators didn't ignore the important role that

practicing sport activities plays in the lives of children. Early childhood educators know how important play is in children's lives. Play is not only a means of entertainment and spending time for children, but it also plays a significant role in the development of the children's psychological skills and abilities. (Verenikina, Harris & Lysaght, 2003: 1)

Literature witnesses a positive impact of participating in sport activities on the children's cognitive skills. It was found out the children who are engaged in sports regularly are able to record high school grades, have good health, good wellbeing, and have no problems with their peers (Felfe, Lechner & Steinmayr, 2011: 4). Physical activity plays a direct and indirect role in the lives of the children. One of the most important benefits is reducing depression, shyness, besides enhancing self-esteem. It was also found out that it reduces the behaviour of rule-breaking and improves the children's academic performance at the class. In addition, practicing sport activities has a significant role in enriching the children's

social life and social skills (Woods, C.B. et al., 2010: 7)

Although there is not much statistical research about the use and efficiency of practicing sport in foreign language education, there are hardly any negative opinions given against practicing sport activities by teachers or students either. It was found out that using other entertaining processes for learning such as digital games supports the process of enriching the students' vocabulary. This non-written, statistically or scientifically non-proven fact is a clear indicator that everyone likes games regardless of their age, gender, or level (Uzun, 2009). Yip and Kwan (2006) have shown that students prefer learning that is supported by digital educational games rather than traditional activity based lessons. According to their study, students who were provided with an electronic environment and games became more successful in learning new words compared to those who learned the same vocabulary through activity based lessons. It was also confirmed that children who were taught using the SHAIEx

digital computer game learned the new words of English, words previously unknown or unheard by them, much more successfully (Aghlara and Tamjid, 2011). Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) have also shown that using digital stories had a positive effect on the understanding of spoken English by a group of 6 year old Spanish children. They employed a pre-post-test design to investigate whether internet-based technology could improve listening comprehension in English as a Foreign Language and found that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the final test administered.

Felfe, Lechner & Steinmayr found a strong positive effects of participation in sports on children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Physical activities are very important for children's development. Encouraging children to participate in sports and providing the necessary infrastructure should therefore be, and in many countries already is, an important policy objective (2011). While providing opportunities for engagement with others through competition in youth

sports, these activities also provide contexts for learning (Theokas, 2009; White & McTeer, 2012). Each context engages participants in a set of behaviours and rules that result in learning skills and a body of knowledge (Choi, Johnson& Kim, 2014).

It can be concluded that participating in sport activities makes students feel more comfortable. Because these activities help the students to have self- expression, thus its influence on the development of the students' skills is very positive. (Choi, Johnson& Kim, 2014)

This study aims at:

*identifying whether or not and to what extent practicing sport activities can enrich the students' vocabulary.

*describing the situation when practicing sport activities is applied during the teaching-learning process at students at elementary Schools both public and private learning English as a second language.

C. Methodology:

Participants

The study was limited to four sports: basketball, volleyball, football and tennis of table. These four competitions focus on learning

vocabulary. The participants were 60, eleven to twelve year old girls and boys. The participants were chosen from two schools where English is taught as a second language: one is a private school and the other is public. The two schools were from two different governorates (Mansoura and Damietta). The students were divided randomly and evenly into two groups: control group and experimental group. The vocabulary knowledge was measured by a test administered to 60 students at the beginning and at the end of the four week of study. The test included 5 main questions. The first question was about a picture of football background with numbers and the students are asked to write the name that each number indicates. The second question was to complete the sentences with a suitable word. The third question was to translate certain English phrases into Arabic. The fourth question was to define the meaning of certain English definitions using Arabic language. The fifth question was to translate some Arabic sentences into English. The lexical items on

the test were selected from terms that are used widely across the four games.

2.3. Instruments

Multi-purpose playground including football playground, tennis table and rackets, basketball playground, and volleyball playground. Besides, tennis table and rackets were used in this study.

2.4. Data collection procedure

The research was conducted from the 20th of November until the 31th of December 2011. The students were divided into two groups: Experimental group and Control group. First of all, all of them had an exam about this English vocabulary to find out the amount of words they already know before starting to teach them. During a 41 day teaching period, which consisted of three 45 minute sessions during the week, students in the experimental group were taught English vocabulary consisting of the names of sport definitions related to the four games, names of different skills for each game, names of sport instruments needed for using these games, names of the different parts and lines of the playground used for playing each game, names of the places

suitable for the players in group games . Playing was paused from time to the other to teach the students the vocabulary needed for understanding these games. Students in the control group didn't practice the four games practically and were taught lessons using the traditional methods.

At the end of the experimental period, final vocabulary test was undertaken by both groups of students. The results of the final test in both groups were expressed as mean \pm standard deviation and were statistically compared using the independent sample t-test with the SPSS statistical software version 16. Significance was set as $p < 0.05$.

Results and findings:

The mean results of the final test in the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 1. The results are based on a test composed of 5 main questions asked to every student about vocabulary as stated in the data collection procedure section at the end of the 41 day teaching period. The marks were given from 30 with 0 being the lowest and 30 being the highest mark.

Table (1)
Pre-test of both Experimental Group and Control Group

Treatment Group	Mean	SD	df	T	Sig.
Experimental	6.03	۲.۵۳۹	29	۰.۹۶۹	۰.۳۴۰
Control	6.53	2.161			

As it can be seen from the table, the mean score in the experimental group was close to the mean score of the control group. As the significance was (0.340) which is > 0.05 , so there was no significance between the pre-test of the Experimental group and the pre-test of the Control group.

In the post test, it can be seen that the mean score in the experimental group was higher than the mean score of the control group ($\text{sig} < 0.05$). The results of the independent t-test analysis (Table 2) indicated that the two means are significantly different from each other $t(29) = ۱۲.۶۶۶, p = ۰.۰۰۱$.

Table (2)
Post-test of both Experimental and Control Groups

Treatment Group	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Experimental	23.46	1.634	29	12.666	0.001
Control	16.73	2.148			

based on the results, it can be concluded, the use of sports activities in learning english vocabulary, as a first foreign language, was more effective at enriching the english vocabulary of the students. practicing sport activities is an important part of most students' leisure lives and increasingly an important part of our culture as a whole. there is now increasing interest in

asking whether practicing sport activities might be offering a powerful new resource to support learning in the information age. research into the use of sport activities in education is relatively novel, but growing rapidly. vocabulary has always been one of the most important issues related both with teachers and learners of foreign languages to such an extent

that it is believed that without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (uzun, 2009). this is particularly evident in countries like egypt where english is taught as the first foreign language in some public and private schools and is not the mother tongue language of the children. as a result, students always welcome learning through playing and having fun instead of the more serious classroom scenarios. processes of language learning have become more engaging by means of educational games which are believed to add fun to classrooms where students would feel more relaxed and comfortable. games create an environment where education is mostly learner centred, with a good opportunity for socialisation when well organised, and awakening the will to win and competitive desire inside people (uzun, 2009). the result of the present study indicates that students in the experimental group were more motivated than students in the control group. they were learning english vocabulary by practicing sport activities and they were not aware that they were engaged seriously in

learning a second language. however, students in the control group were fully aware of their serious activity which was learning vocabulary. this non-written, statistically or scientifically non-proven fact is a clear indicator that everyone likes games regardless of their age, gender, or level (uzun, 2009). other previous studies have confirmed that students don't prefer traditional activity based lessons. some of them found out that they like learning that is supported by digital educational games (e.g. yip and kwan, 2006); other studies reached the conclusion that providing students with electronic environment and games help them learn more words as compared to their colleagues who learn through other traditional methods (e.g. aghlara and tamjid, 2011); besides verdugo& belmonte (2007) have found out that using also shown that using digital stories had a positive effect on the understanding of spoken english by a group of 6 year old spanish children. they employed untraditional methods for learning such as digital stories had a great

impact on understanding spoken English.

According to Murphy (1999), practicing sport activities is crucial for improving the skills of an individual; improvement of skills leads to higher levels of performance. Through practicing sports, students learn and improve not only skills, but also mental, emotional, and spiritual strength by setting goals to achieve them. Students are motivated by others through sport activities. Better performances are produced when students are challenged by their competitors (James, 2001).

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the results of this study that practicing sport activities has positive effects on the learning process. Using such activities in the classroom results in better motivation and facilitates the learning process for the students and their cognitive achievement. The learning process becomes much more enjoyable and by engaging children in such activities, the stresses involved in the learning process are drastically reduced. Thus, mingling practicing sports with the learning process would

increase the opportunity of having more successful students than when using traditional methods.

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