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The Impact of Educational Games at Professional English Lessons in Iraqi Schools

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study we present the most helpful material in the field of teaching foreign languages is to analyze the results of using professional English courses with educational games in Iraqi schools, indicates, it's a tools used in the teaching second language. In this work, we aim to explore the effects of education games on improving and developing learners'. The participants are fifth grade from two different elementary schools. This is a deliberate selection on the part of the researcher. One hundred and thirty-eight students were selected randomly from the fifth grade class. After testing the tool with two groups; experimental and control group, researchers concluded that educational games are more beneficial than more conventional methods. Playing educational games significantly affects the motivation of Iraqi students, according to the results of this study, and they are also helpful in increasing students' exposure to vocabulary and providing students with meaningful practice of language.

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أثر الألعاب التربوية في دروس اللغة الانجليزية في مدارس العراقية المهنية

دلال فنر عبد الباقي/جامعة تكريت

الخلاصة:

الغرض من هذه الدراسة تقديم المادة الأكثر فائدة في مجال تدريس اللغات الأجنبية هو تحليل نتائج استخدام دورات اللغة الإنجليزية الاحترافية مع الألعاب التعليمية في المدارس العراقية، وتشير إلى أنها من الأدوات المستخدمة في تدريس اللغة الثانية. ونهدف في هذا العمل إلى استكشاف أثر الألعاب التعليمية في تحسين وتنمية مهارات المتعلمين. المشاركون هم الصف الخامس من مدرستين ابتدائيتين مختلفتين. وهذا اختيار متعمد من جانب الباحث. تم اختيار مائة وثمانية وثلاثين طالباً بطريقة عشوائية من الصف الخامس. بعد اختبار الأداة على مجموعتين؛ وخلص الباحثون في المجموعة التجريبية والضابطة إلى أن الألعاب

التعليمية أكثر فائدة من الطرق التقليدية. إن ممارسة الألعاب التعليمية تؤثر بشكل كبير على دافعية الطلاب العراقيين، وفقا لنتائج هذه الدراسة، كما أنها تساعد في زيادة تعرض الطلاب للمفردات وتزويد الطلاب بممارسة مفيدة للغة.

لكلمات المفتاحية: الألعاب التعليمية، الألعاب، اللغة الإنجليزية، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

1. Introduction

Humans use language to convey their thoughts and ideas to one another. Learning a new language requires a significant time commitment. Constant effort is required, and this effort must be maintained for a considerable period of time (Andrew, 1984: p.6).

As a means of communication and expression, language is fundamental to every culture. So, in addition to being a part of culture itself, language serves as a channel via which other aspects of culture can be shared (Lado, 1964:p 23). It's not enough to treat teaching English the same way you would any other subject. This is because, as stated by Streven (1977: p12–13), teaching a foreign language is an obligation that a subset of the education profession around the world imposes and specifically mentions intelligence, imagination, training, command of language, a body of knowledge, and the application of judgement.

The countries and cultures where a language is spoken can serve as inspiration for students. Their goal in studying the language is to learn more about the people who speak it and the places where they reside. English is taught in schools because someone in authority determined it should (Harmer, 1983:p 182).

Many approaches have emerged with the goals of education in mind, and one of the first principles of language acquisition (particularly in the early stages) is that it should be fun. The use of games and other forms of active learning has

been increasingly popular among language instructors in recent years (Al-Hamash, 1982:p 1).

Teachers are beginning to pay greater attention to alternative methods, such as language games (Abdul-Aziz, 1983: 5). The use of educational games has been shown to be effective in maintaining students' attention and encouraging them to continue their studies (Andrew, 1984: 6). Furthermore, educational games are highly motivating because of their interesting and engaging character. They can be used to help people in general become better communicators (Ersoz, 2000: 7). While being fun and challenging, educational games are great for building collaboration and communication skills (Yin Yong, 2000: 6). In class, students can use games to review and practise what they've learnt (Hooper, 2004: 19). Well-selected games are invaluable because they give students a much-needed break while simultaneously giving them the chance to develop their language skills (Thanh, 2003: 4).

Multiple studies have shown that using games to study a new language's vocabulary is highly efficient (Vasileiadou&Makrina, 2017:p134). Ashraf, et al. (2014) elaborate on the effect games have on kids' language development. The participating academics have been divided in half. One of the groups had their vocabulary in the target language taught to them through games. In total, there were twenty-five people. Meanwhile, the remaining fifteen students learned vocabulary the traditional way (through textbooks). Ashraf et al. (2014) find out that the use of games to learn new vocabulary was effective.

The impact of games on second language learning is investigated by Calvo-Ferrer (2017). Participants in his study were split into two groups: those who learned vocabulary for the target language through games and those who learnt vocabulary through textbook vocabulary exercises. It was clear from both the pre- and post-tests that participants who were taught vocabulary through games in a

compressed time period outperformed those whose vocabulary was taught using more conventional ways. When learning new words in English, children were more interested and motivated when they were playing games.

Peterson (2013) looked explored the impact of games on kindergarteners' vocabulary growth. A total of 164 participants remained with him during the entire fifteen weeks of his research. Peterson questioned sixty-seven young adults for his report. The youngsters played for fifteen minutes twice a week. However, for 97 of the pupils, regular lessons based on the school curriculum were implemented. According to his findings, people who played these games had a greater number of words in their vocabularies thereafter.

Similar results are discovered by Saffarian and Gorjian (2012:p44-84). There were 418 teachers of English as a foreign language and 111 pupils from local primary schools that took part. While some of the children in the study continued with their regular classroom activities, others were offered computer games as a kind of training. Saffarian and Gorjian found that children who used games as a means of instruction outperformed their peers by a significant margin.

Sundqvist and Sylvèn (2014:p3-20) found that playing games significantly increased children's motivation to learn new English vocabulary, which in turn increased their English language skills. When Sundqvist and Sylvèn did their research, 76 EL fourth graders were included. According to the survey, most students are more comfortable using English in front of their peers and are more motivated to expand their vocabulary. In addition, Derakhshan and Khatir (2015:p) claimed that using video games to study a foreign language is more effective than other approaches.

Bytheway's (2014) research, on the other hand, investigated the impact of video gaming on young people's language development. Her study includes data from

six active professional players. Her findings show that playing games helps kids learn words in context. The learning process is thereby improved and yields greater fruit. Jensen (2017:p1-14) found that game play aided participants in learning new English vocabulary.

Yudintseva (2015:p101-109) found that using a variety of methods, including video games, helped her students learn new vocabulary in their target language. Children acquire new words in a target language by active participation in a range of activities, according to numerous research. According to research by Vahdat and Behbahani (2013:p 61-71) conducted in Iran, EFL children acquire and retain more vocabulary through the use of games. The participants in the study were intermediate-level adults aged 40. Vahdat and Behbahani administered the TOEFL to their research participants. Those who played video games while learning language made bigger gains than those who didn't, and the study indicated that men were more interested in using video games to acquire vocabulary than women were. This led them to conclude that gender differences in language training through gaming existed. Digital games can help children improve their English and vocabulary by creating an environment where they can have meaningful conversations and have a deeper knowledge of new subjects. Children need extra help with the English language's vocabulary and other parts. Children need to expand their vocabularies by learning new English words in order to become proficient speakers. Children's vocabulary is a powerful instrument for skill development (Bahksh, 2016:p120).

To be fluent in both spoken and written English, it is necessary to study the contents of thousands of oxford dictionaries (Peterson, 2013). Tuan (2011:p1688-1695) revealed that vocabulary size had a strong relationship with four measures of English language competence. It is essential for youngsters who want to become fluent English speakers to learn new vocabulary and comprehend how it links to all other English skills (Schmitt, 2010). It seems that many children have

difficulty with vocabulary for the same reason (a lack of motivation) (Jung & Graf, 2008); this is the most challenging aspect of learning a new language. Teachers can aid their pupils in developing their vocabulary through a number of strategies. When kids work with real stuff, they pick up a lot of new vocabulary words. So, it's clear that learning new words is helpful. It's important to take a direct approach with kids when no one around them can communicate with them in their native tongue. In this classroom, English is spoken exclusively. Games that include a wide range of experiences are ideal for facilitating children's rapid acquisition of a large vocabulary.

Games in Education initiative trains teachers to use gaming to foster students' personal and social growth in the classroom. Games for Change (Gama) was established to aid educators in identifying and incorporating pedagogically sound games into their curriculum (McFarlane, et al. (2002). While some teachers are experimenting with video games as a teaching tool, others are skeptical of their usefulness (Rea, 2002: 153). Increased knowledge and memory retention are two of the most frequently mentioned beneficial impacts of games on learning (Harrer,A.B(2003: p135).

2. Statement of the Problem

Students are encouraged to actively engage in a variety of classroom activities and to keep lines of communication open as part of the contemporary method of teaching foreign languages. Unfortunately, traditional methods of teaching a foreign language are still widely used in Iraq. The student's contribution is downplayed in favour of the teacher, and all that's required of them is to take notes and parrot back what they hear.

Another challenging aspect of teaching a foreign language is coming up with strategies to promote and enable classroom use of the target language. This study assessed the English proficiency of fifth grade students and found that there was

a significant decline from the previous year. This decline may be due to a lack of enthusiasm in studying English or the inability of educators to adopt more progressive methods of education. However, the primary purpose of this research is to examine how video games have affected the teaching of English as a foreign language in Iraqi schools. So, here's the question that's being considered:

What is the impact of educational games at professional English lessons in Iraqi schools?

3. Educational Games

Educational games are a cutting-edge method of teaching English as a second language because they put the spotlight squarely on the learner. Learning provides the student with happiness and psychological pleasure, helps him grow as a person in all aspects of his life (physically, mentally, and socially), and keeps him on the move, engaged, and curious as he pursues his goals. (McFarlane et al., 2002: p.112).

Educational video games can be used to reinvigorate the learning process, leading to increased student engagement and improved academic outcomes. The cognitive development, exploratory learning, pinpoint accuracy, and vocabulary and framework acquisition that result from playing educational games are all areas where students excel. Melgani, as of 2016 (McFarlane et al., 2002: p.112).

Some academics have tried to draw a line between games and simulations, while others have zeroed in on specific game styles. (Dempsey, Lucassen, Gilley, & Rasmussen, 1993-1994) Games are overt instructional or learning methods that incorporate competition and are guided by rules. Educational games are ones that have been developed with the aim of education in mind (Willis, J. et al, 2017). The most all-inclusive description of educational games would include all of the great things about them.

Deesri (2002: 1) defines a game as "a form of play governed by rules," and this definition captures the heart of what makes a game enjoyable. They do more than just give a break from the monotony of schoolwork; they also encourage the student to utilize the target language in natural situations.

However, Lee pointed out that many people hold the misconception that learning should be taken very seriously and that any activity involving levity and mirth is somehow not genuine education. This is an incorrect assumption. One can study a foreign language while having a good time. Games are a great medium for this purpose. Using games in the classroom has numerous positive outcomes Bakhsh, 2016: p.120):

1. playing games in language class is a fun way to break up the monotony.
2. They push you forward and test your limits.
3. Games encourage and support the time and effort necessary to learn a new language.
4. Linguistic abilities (oral, written, aural, and literate) are all strengthened through playing language games.
5. They stimulate conversation and cooperation among pupils.
6. They set up an appropriate environment for communication.

Games are enjoyable, and kids enjoy them, according to a study by Mei and Yu-jing (2000). Children learn to take risks, explore, and engage with the world around them via play. Learning English through play allows pupils to pick up the language without feeling overwhelmed, much to how young children pick up their native languages.

Incorporating creative educational games into the classroom has been shown to boost engagement and retention of previously taught material. It's also a great,

engaging alternative to the traditional lecture approach for imparting knowledge. Furthermore, educational games substantially enhance both team learning and active peer-to-peer instruction (Bailey, 1999:p79).

Learning games help teachers to be more innovative in their approach to teaching, while also increasing students' engagement, motivation, and interest in the subject matter. This view was supported by research (Odenweller, 1998). Students' critical thinking can also be assessed through gaming because of the emphasis on practical application. They encourage students to work together to tackle difficult challenges in a friendly and enjoyable setting (Patil, 1993).

3.1 Elements of Educational Games

Any game and in order to be educational should have the following basic elements:

1. **Goal:**A game's intended educational outcomes should be consistent with the game's learning objectives. A useful way to think about objectives is via the lens of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (McFarlane et al., 2002: p.90).
2. **Rules:**The rules that teach kids how to play a game are an important and demanding part of every game. Students need to be "taught" these rules before they can participate in the game.
3. **Competition:**Competing against another student, against the organ itself, against a test, or against any other criterion is one way to motivate students to study and improve their performance in the classroom.
4. **Challenge:** The player should be challenged suitably, to the point where their talents are depleted. This test should be just beyond the pupils' current abilities.
5. **Imagination:**Learners' interest and drive to study are sparked by the game's use of their creative faculties.

6. Entertainment: The game's goal should be to provide a palpable sense of delight. This is not the game's intended purpose, but it is something that needs to be considered along with the fun and learning elements (McFarlane et al., 2002: p.90).

3.2 Features of Educational Games

- They employ audiovisual effects, as engaging more than one sense enhances learning.
- Play is an intrinsic learner inclination, thus it can be used to urge the learner to know things the learner has never encountered (Misa, 2022). This boosts students' motivation to study new material.
- Playing alone, without the presence of a rival or a potential source of conflict, provides a respite from competition and strife.
- Play the game yourself and win without needing outside help.
- E-games are fun and one of the most interesting and attractive educational tools.
- The use of games is one of the most effective ways to stimulate the learner's mind and encourage the growth of his cognitive abilities, particularly in the area of creative thought.
- Online educational games are not limited in time. A student may play at his or her convenience and for as long as desired.
- Electronic learning games break down content into manageable chunks, each of which may be completed with a single correct answer and instant feedback, keeping the learner's attention on the game's instructional goal and encouraging them to keep going. The psychological strains of schooling and socialization can

be relieved through play, making the learning environment more conducive to retention.

- Compiles information with abilities like reasoning, problem-solving, planning, and making choices.
- They are powerful resources for tailoring instruction to the specific needs of each student and developing their skills to their fullest potential. The ability to play educational games multiple times guarantees that students will eventually reach a high level of competence and proficiency (Islam, 2017)
- They give students hands-on experience with computers that is otherwise hard to come by in a classroom setting.
- Despite these positives, there are health and behavioural concerns associated with learners' excessive usage of e-learning games without rationalisation and control.

3.3 Educational Games in EFL Learning

When applied properly to the specific context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, games have the potential to become incredibly effective. Students can learn a foreign language in the same manner they study their native tongue by participating in competitive activities, which give them a natural opportunity to collaborate and communicate with one another. The obvious reinforcement and involvement given by these games will facilitate quicker and more efficient information processing. In addition, the inherent competitive drive in most people makes educational games a great way to get students learning a new language to work towards a common goal. Because of this, pupils' stress levels will decrease, increasing their drive to study (Talak-Kiry, 2010).

Implementing educational games in EFL classes helps teach students how to utilize the language effectively rather than just practicing language in a classroom context. It's indisputable that when people contact with one another in the real world, real discussion takes place. Teachers can utilize games to create a calm atmosphere that promotes focus and reduces anxiety among their students.

4. Previous Studies

The effects of spelling games on the spelling test scores of third, fourth, and fifth graders were investigated by Keen (1984). The study's sample included children in third, fourth, and fifth grades. Both groups were taught the same material, but the experimental group used games. As part of the investigation, we looked at measures of reading fluency, pronunciation skills, and total exam results from Monday through Friday. In addition to a gain in vocabulary over the course of the study, the statistical analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in proper spelling between the third, fourth, and fifth classes (Keen, 1984: 1024).

Research into the impact of students' use of educational games on the development of their verbal and written English competence at the end of fifth grade was conducted (Al-Ni'aيمي, 2004). Girls in fifth grade at Ninevah's Al-Awda Primary School were the only subjects in this study, which was conducted during the 2002-2003 academic year. In all, 55 students took part in the study, with 28 assigned to the control group and 21 assigned to the experimental group. While the control group was taught in the conventional manner, the experimental group learned through the use of educational video games. The experimental group showed statistically significant gains in all measures of English competence compared to the control group.

5. Methodology

Choosing an appropriate study design is one of the most important aspects of conducting research (Van Dalen, 1979: 232). Properly constructed experiments

that adhere to the researcher's protocols allow for the testing of hypotheses (Best, 1981: 68). The study employed a co-equivalent group experimental design since it was thought to be appropriate for the study's goals. The study's experimental group received instruction via educational games.

This study used data from the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year at two different elementary schools in Baghdad, Iraq. Two schools were left out of the research because they did not have a fifth grade. That's a grand total of (138), split evenly between (70) female and (68) male schools.

6. Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of educational games in formal English classes in Iraqi schools. The control group did not get the expanded vocabulary teaching with pictures of vocabularies that the experimental group did. The teacher's job is to use the cards to teach the students about the names of common household objects, animals, and classroom supplies. The educator then engages in a round of brainstorming by asking the class to name the photos on the cards. Students are able to draw meaningful connections between the pictures and appropriate words thanks to these exercises.

As a result, 45 young women took part in the informative activity. The usage of cards as a learning tool and a source of student motivation has been validated. While 39 male students took part in the instructional activity. However, the research showed that using educational games as a tool was more beneficial than using more conventional methods. Based on the results of this study, playing educational games has a significant effect on the motivation of students in Iraq. They are useful in increasing students' exposure to new words and providing students with meaningful practice of language.

Conclusion

This evidence suggests that educational video games might be useful for teaching English to elementary school children. The effectiveness of instructional games in raising fifth-graders' English skills. Playing games can be a great way to teach English as a second language.

The researcher proposes the following changes: Why it's crucial that EFL educators incorporate fun activities into lesson plans. The English department of the Directorate of Education should be given the task of educating and preparing educators to use games in the classroom. A new curriculum revamp is necessary in the English Department at the University of the First Year.

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