

EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMES IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING OF SPANISH VOCABULARY: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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Abstract

Vocabulary is one of the most important component in the process of learning a second language or foreign language, which aids to develop all language skills i.e. speaking, writing, listening and reading. Adequate vocabulary facilitates the successful usage of language and thus helps to use learnt structures, grammar and functions efficiently. However, learning vocabulary has been a difficult and boring task for students. Hence, through this paper, we intend to find the ways in which vocabulary can be taught and learnt in an interesting way which engages the students and makes the task easy for them. Therefore, we have chosen games as an important tool to teach Spanish vocabulary and hereby, wish to demonstrate the usefulness and effectiveness of games in the teaching-learning of Spanish as a foreign language. For this purpose, we conducted an experimental study at beginner's level of Spanish at Jawaharlal Nehru University where Spanish vocabulary was taught using various online and offline games such as dumb charades, Pictionary, kahoot, duolingo, categories, Last man standing etc. Results show that games used in teaching Spanish vocabulary have helped students to learn and memorize vocabulary easily. Moreover, it made classroom session very interesting, interactive, participatory and helped students to build social connections with teacher and their classmates and boosted their motivation.

Keywords: games, language learning, Spanish, vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

Speaking, writing, listening and reading are the skills that are considered very fundamental in the teaching and learning of a foreign or second language. In addition to these “macro-skills”, various researchers state that the role of “micro-skills” cannot be neglected (in Aydoğan, 2014). These micro-skills consist of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling. Each aspect mentioned is equally important for learning/acquiring language, however, what Thornburry (2002) affirms, shows that vocabulary's significance weigh slightly more than others. He says “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (Aribowo, 2008). Furthermore, Harmer (1993) also argues that “if language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and flesh” (cited in Marius, 2018). These statements highlight the importance of vocabulary and give it central place in the teaching and learning of language. In simple words, the term vocabulary is defined by Ur (1998) as the words taught in a foreign language. Neuman & Dwyer (2009) states that vocabulary are those words which a learner should know in to order achieve an effective communication. Vocabulary aids to develop all language skills i.e. speaking, writing, listening and reading. Less knowledge of vocabulary can lead to difficulty in using learnt language and grammar as affirmed by Rivers and Nunan (1991) (cited in Alqahtani, 2015). Therefore, adequate vocabulary is required for the successful usage of language, learnt structures, grammar and functions efficiently. Nevertheless,

research (Cameron, 2001; Schmitt, 2000; Nation, 1990; Huckin, Haynes and Coady, 1995; Gu, 2003; Mario, 2008; Maximo, 2000) shows that vocabulary teaching is the most important component on one hand, whereas on the other hand, it is also a difficult aspect of teaching and learning (ex. Marius, 2018). Learning vocabulary has been a boring and difficult task for students. Hence, through this paper, we intend to find the ways in which vocabulary can be taught and learnt in an interesting way which engages the students and makes the task easy for them. Therefore, we have chosen games as an important tool to teach Spanish vocabulary and hereby, wish to demonstrate the usefulness and effectiveness of games in the teaching-learning of Spanish as a foreign language.

GAMES

Games can be defined as activities which are “governed by rules” (Khan, 1991) and are “entertaining and engaging, often challenging” (Wright et. al. ;2006) with clearly set goals where learners play and interact with each other. Researchers highlights following advantages of using games in the teaching and learning of language:

- Harmer states that game has a therapeutic effect on learners (cited in Marius, 2018). He suggests using games at any stage of the class like in beginning, middle or end.
- Hansen (1994) affirms that games boost learners’ motivation and helps them to get along well with other students and teacher (in Marius, 2018).
- It also helps introvert students and encourages them to share their opinions and feelings.
- Marius (2018) affirms that using games makes the classroom natural and alive.
- Games help to reduce boredom and makes lessons interesting.
- Games facilitates the language acquisition and learning as it helps in decreasing anxiety (Richard, 1998).
- Games foster spontaneous usage of the language and increase creativity (I. Chen, 2005).

Keeping in mind the above advantages we conducted an experimental study where students were taught Spanish vocabulary through games. The objective of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using games in Spanish language classroom for vocabulary learning.

METHODOLOGY

Type of Study

The study is experimental in nature.

Context

The study is conducted in Jawaharlal Nehru University with the students of beginners’ level Spanish i.e. B.A (Hons) 1st year (Spanish) who belong to Department CSPILAS (Centre of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Latin American Studies).

Population

Sample selected for the study are the students of 1st year Graduation. There are total 38 students in the class, but as the classroom examples provided below belong to two different classes and days, thus in both the activities participated different number of students. In Activity 1 participated 25 students, while in the Activity, 33 students participated.

Instrument

Classroom activity and Questionnaire

Method

In order to find the effectiveness of the usage of games in vocabulary learning, a number of games were used to revise Spanish vocabulary and help students to learn it. For this purpose, games like dumb charades, Pictionary, last man standing, kahoot, categories, etc. were incorporated in classroom. These classroom activities were divided into three stages:

- a) **Pre-task:** This is the first stage of the activity which had an objective to prepare students for the task/activity. The students were informed about the topic and the tool i.e. the game through which students will practice or learn the topic. For instance, the game was explained to the students and the necessary instructions were given to them. In this stage rules of the games were explained to the students and teacher told them how to play it. Once the game and instructions were clear, students were divided into the groups or teams as per requirement.
- b) **During task:** In this stage, classroom activity took place by playing or by incorporating game. And the student’s performance was evaluated.
- c) **Post-task:** At the end of activity, students were asked to fill questionnaire which was based on variables such as: motivation, anxiety, classroom environment, creativity, participation, boredom, vocabulary acquisition, student relationship with classmates, student-teacher relationship. Below are some classroom examples where I incorporated games for vocabulary teaching and learning:

ACTIVITY 1

| |
|---|
| Topic: Regular verbs (ar, er, ir) ending verbs |
| Objective of activity: To revise and remember by heart the meanings of verbs from Spanish to English/ Hindi and vice-versa. |
| Game used: Dumb Charades_ |
| Time: 1 hour |
| Material: chits (made of paper), pen. |
| How to play: Dumb charades is a game which Indian students are very familiar with. They also call it ‘Damshalas’ where the opponent team gives the name of movie to other team and that team has to enact the name of movie within certain period of time without uttering a single word out of their mouth. People generally play this game at home, schools, colleges, parties. While using this game for the purpose of learning verbs and their meaning from English/Hindi to Spanish and vice-versa students had to write different regular verbs (ar, er, ir ending) in Spanish on chits with English translation and keep them in a container. After the making of chits, teacher asks student to come one by one and enact the verb without uttering a single word. The team of the student has to guess the verb and tell the verb in Spanish not in English. |
| Rules: Following are rules that were told to students in order to carry out the activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not speak, only act. If the person that is acting speaks instead of acting, there will be negative marking, i.e. (-1). • Guessing the right vocabulary will make you earn 1 point. • If unable to guess vocabulary, next team will get the chance. |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| No. of students: 25 | |
| 5 mins | <p>Procedure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher asks 2-3 students to take out page from their notebooks and cut them into chits. Then, teacher distribute chits to the students and divide the verbs and ask them to write on the chits. Later, teacher ask students to fold and put the chits in a container. Now, teacher divides the class in 5 teams of 5 students each. Teacher explains the rules of the games to the students. Teacher asks the students to come one by one and enact the verb written on the chit. Teacher writes the score on the board of each team. At the end teacher calculates the score, discuss the vocabularies which students found difficult to guess. At the end teacher distributed the questionnaires and asked students to fill it. |
| 5 mins | |
| 5 mins | |
| 30 mins | |
| 15 mins | |

ACTIVITY 2

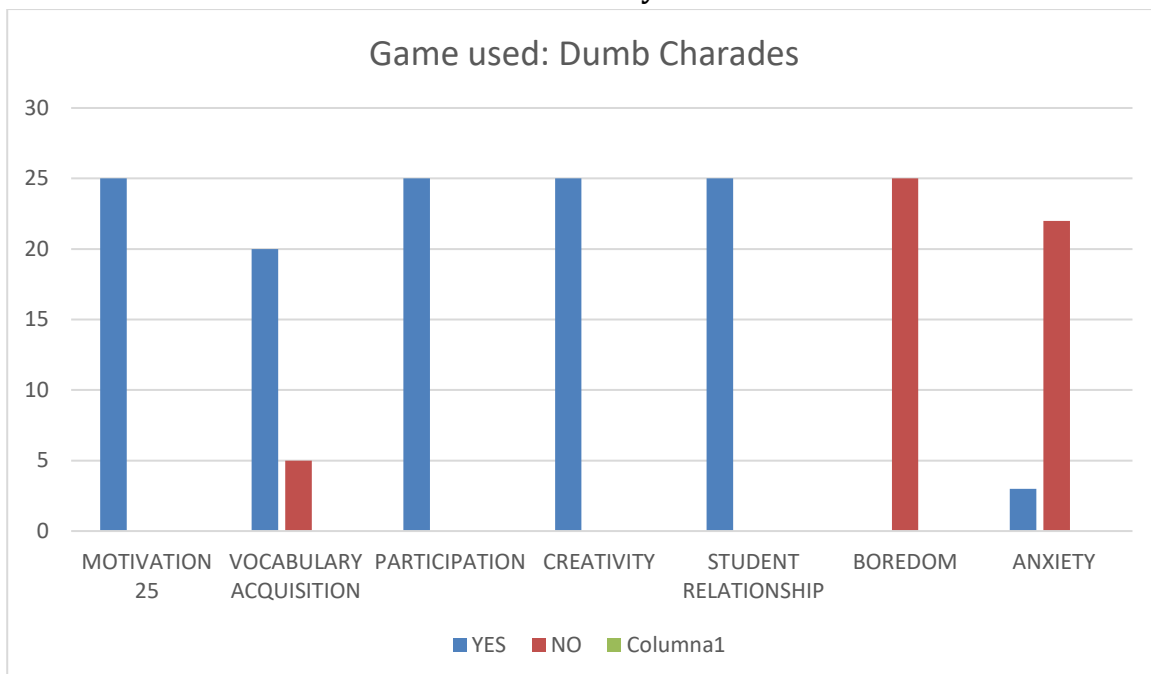
| | |
|--|--|
| Topic: Food, clothes, adjectives, days, week, furniture, planets, zodiac signs, professions, nationality, colors, seasons, body parts | |
| Objective of activity: Prepare and revise vocabulary (which are part of syllabus for 2 nd term exam) | |
| Game used: Categories | |
| Time: 1 hour | |
| Material: A 4 sheet and pen | |
| How to play: First of all, it is necessary that students have all their books, notes, mobile devices and notebooks closed. It's better that student perform the activity in a separate page. Firstly, students have to make six columns. The teacher chooses a letter and ask students to write any 5 words starting from that letter in Spanish. In the first column, the student will write the letter and in the next five columns, student will write five vocabularies which start with that letter. | |
| <p>Rules: Students are told the following rules in order to conduct the activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start only when the teacher says 1,2,3 go...If teacher notices anyone writing before they are asked to, the team will be disqualified from that round. 1st two teams that complete 5 words will earn 5 points. 2nd two teams will earn 3 points 3rd two teams will earn 2 points. | |
| No. of students: 33 | |
| 10 mins | <p>Procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher divides the class in 8 teams of 4 members in 7 teams and 5 members in the 8th team. Teacher explains the game and it's rules to the students. Teacher distributes the A4 size sheet to all teams and asks them to keep their bags, mobiles and notes near the door, far from them. Teacher writes the letter 'B' on blackboard and say 1,2,3 go.. |
| 3 mins | |

| | |
|---------|--|
| 35 mins | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now teacher writes the score on the board and repeats the same. • At the end, teacher calculates the score and announces the 1st, 2nd and 3rd winner and as a reward doesn't give them homework. The other teams were given a homework to memorize the vocabulary again and are asked to do an exercise related to vocabulary. |
| 10 mins | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher distributes the questionnaire and asks students to fill it. |

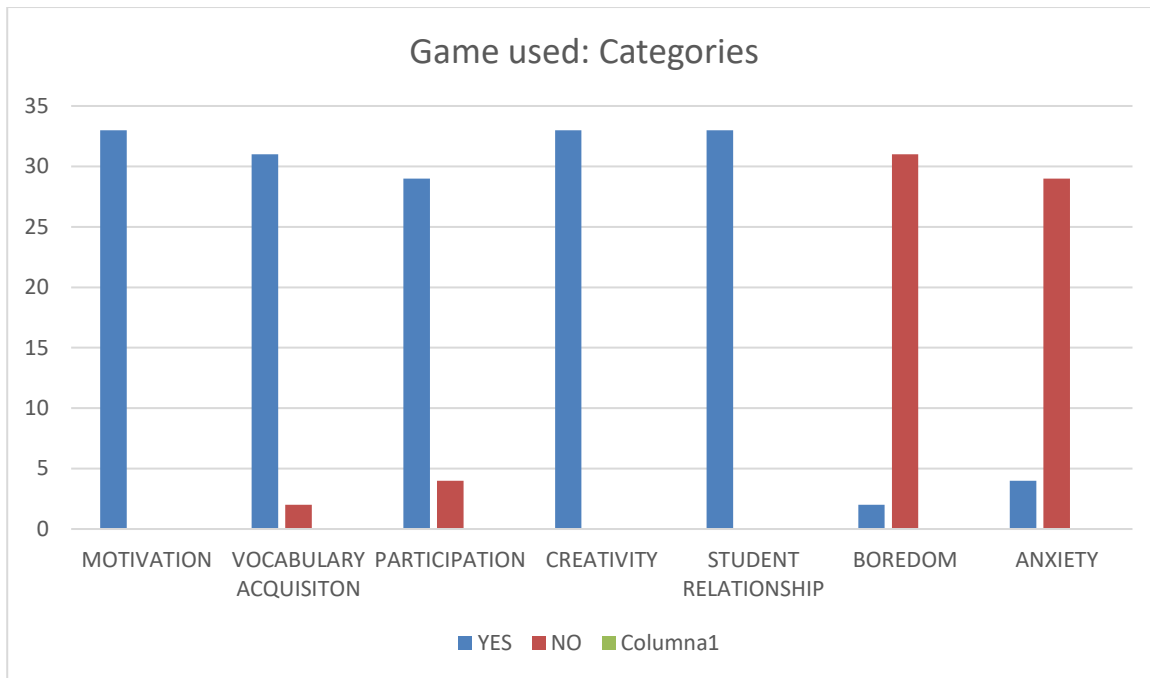
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

After the activities, feedback was collected by distributing questionnaires to the students to know the effectiveness of using games in teaching-learning of Spanish vocabulary. Questions consists of two options yes or no. Following graphs summarizes the results and findings obtained from the questionnaires for **Activity 1 (Dumb Charades)** and **Activity 2 (Categories)**.

Activity 1:



Activity 2



1) Motivation: Results shows that incorporating games in the lessons highly motivated students.

Activity 1:

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 25 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0 |

Activity 2:

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 33 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0 |

2) Vocabulary acquisition: Most of the students (80% in activity 1 and 93 % in activity 2) agrees that games helped them in acquiring vocabulary easily.

Activity 1

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 20 | 80% |
| No | 5 | 20% |

Activity 2

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 31 | 93% |
| No | 2 | 7% |

3) Participation: Results from both the activities shows that games engaged students and encouraged their participation

Activity 1

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 25 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0% |

Activity 2

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 29 | 88% |
| No | 4 | 12% |

4) Creativity: Difference in results of the activities shows that in order to encourage student's creativity teacher needs to keep likes and dislikes of students.

Activity 1

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 19 | 76% |
| No | 6 | 24% |

Activity 2

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 33 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0 |

5) Student-student and student-teacher relationship: Results from both the activities shows that games are highly helpful in improving students’ relationship with students and teachers and thus, encourage a friendly environment in classroom.

Activity 1

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 25 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0 |

Activity 2

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 33 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0 |

6) Boredom: Students highly enjoyed the activity 1, while 6% of them felt bored during the activity 2.

Activity 1

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 0 | 0 |
| No | 25 | 100% |

Activity 2

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 2 | 6% |
| No | 31 | 94% |

8) Anxiety: Results from both the activities shows that games helps to lower anxiety levels during language learning.

Activity 1:

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 3 | 12% |
| No | 22 | 88% |

Activity 2

| | No. of students | In (%) |
|-----|-----------------|--------|
| Yes | 4 | 12% |
| No | 29 | 88% |

Results showed us how games made the class interesting and reduced boredom and student’s anxiety. It helped to motivate students, encouraged them and facilitated the vocabulary memorization effectively and easily. However, these classroom experiences taught us some necessary things that teachers should keep in mind while incorporating games for language teaching-learning, which are following:

- a) It is good to choose and incorporate games that are familiar to students. It makes them instantly connected to the activity and hence boost their motivation and efforts.
- b) It is advised to make a lesson plan or design activity before class, so that teacher knows beforehand the tools, materials required and also get to know about challenges in advance that might occur.
- c) Variety of games should be used so that students keep feeling excited, engaged and interested.
- d) Teacher should try to divide class in groups or teams because games in teams invites more interaction and participation of students. Also, it engages and encourages students especially those who are introvert and thus creates a healthy and friendly environment in classroom.
- e) It is important to draw students’ attention more towards achieving goal or objective of the activity than scoreboard.

- f) Sometimes, while using games, students might get very noisy due to excitement, so it's important for teacher to take necessary measures.
- g) It is important to give clear instructions and rules.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the significance of games in the teaching and learning of vocabulary and hence highlights some classroom examples of incorporating games. Results show that games are highly useful in the teaching-learning of vocabulary. It helped students to learn and memorize vocabulary easily with lots of fun and friendly environment. Moreover, it made classroom session very interesting, interactive, participatory and helped students to build social connections with teacher and their classmates and boosted their motivation. It also encourages the creativity and lowers the anxiety level. The study was limited to only beginner's level, hence cannot be generalized. It further presents the scope for the teachers to use games at other levels and evaluate its effectiveness at intermediate and advanced levels.

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