

The Importance of Mime Games in Vocabulary Teaching to EFL Students at a Private University in Iraq

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Abstract: In this study, Mime Games, one of the vocabulary teaching methods, was researched and studies were conducted on whether word games are useful or not. As educators, we have witnessed all kinds of students in our lessons, like self-motivated, unrelated to classes, or unwilling. The main purpose of doing this research is to motivate students among the groups who are reluctant and unrelated to the lesson by teaching vocabulary with fun. Therefore, we researched the role of Mime Games in teaching English to EFL learners. In order to get accurate results, a face-to-face survey and a questionnaire were applied to collect students' thoughts about word games. As a result of the research and applications, it was observed that the students were more successful and motivated when they were learning with the games.

Keywords: Games in Vocabulary Learning, Mime Games, Vocabulary Games, Vocabulary Learning

1. Introduction

Lesson-based activities, such as vocabulary games in small groups, crosswords on the smart board, listening to a song with lyrics and singing as a class, and so on, can be used at the beginning, middle, and conclusion of classes to help students maintain focus (Tosun & Yildiz, 2015). In this context, vocabulary has an essential place in both language learning and teaching. Learners may be good at grammar or speaking but may not be able to express themselves well if their vocabulary is low. In today's world, people, especially young people, are trying to describe themselves with a few words, and it is very important how correctly they use the language and vocabulary during this description. Usually, in language lessons, learners may direct teachers such statements, learning words aren't important, and using new words is useless in their lives, one day they will forget them anyway. All ages and genders can benefit from playing games, but young people in particular can learn valuable life skills through play. It is well established that children's psychological growth and social adaption can be sped up through exposure to a variety of games across the lifespan (Celik et al., 2022). "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972, p. 111). Wilkins emphasizes the importance of vocabulary, so if a person knows a little about grammar, he or she may get the concept, but without knowing any vocabulary it is impossible to understand the main idea.

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In order to communicate well in a foreign language, students need to know enough words and more importantly, they must use them correctly (Huyen & Nga 2003; Abdalrahman, 2022). Huyen and Nga try to imply the importance of vocabulary knowledge and argue that students will have difficulty in communicating with limited words. In addition to this, the rationale to teach vocabulary can be understood considering the importance of vocabulary at an early age as well. A learner must reach an adequate number of words then he or she will have the ability to communicate. Shabaneh and Farrah (2019) had research in Palestine with the participation of 20 students in the 2018-2019 academic year. The results are worth examining and show that learning English is an important stage of life, and the best teaching method of English would be through games. As a result of the study, it was seen that the learners became more compatible with their environment and their speaking skills increased.

The existence of psychological barriers in the learning process is an important problem. Teachers can break these barriers by playing language games because students are happier and learn more efficiently when they play (Silsüpür, 2017; Abdalrahman & Kara, 2022). Language games help students reduce their stress and feel more comfortable in classes. Playing games makes them more permanent and students also feel happier when they play because there are no restrictions. Additionally, they improve their speaking skills. It can be also concluded that through the games played in the classroom, we can engage the shy students in the lesson and get them to socialize. For many years, classically, in classrooms, students were given words on paper and memorized, but today's students do not like and even hate such methods.

2. Literature Review

The history of Mime Games goes back to ancient Greek history. Pantomime, or miming, is a form of performance art in which the silent actor must convey a feeling or scene using only facial expressions and body language. The word "mime" comes from the Greek word "pantomimes" which means "imitating all" ("Our Pastimes," n.d.). The origins of mime can be traced back to the theater of ancient Greece. As it is stated here, miming was first used as a part of theater in ancient Greece.

Diana (2010) in a study noted two advantages and two disadvantages of implementing games in vocabulary learning. The first advantage, she noted that if educational games are used in the lessons, the learners will participate in the lesson more actively. The second advantage of applying some games in teaching, the teachers will not spend all their time explaining the words. On the other hand, they will give the necessary instructions at the beginning of the game and then follow the students in a passive role. Whereas the first disadvantage of applying games to the teaching-learning process is that there will be a noisy environment during the game and the classroom may get out of the control of the teacher. The second disadvantage is, there will be a limited time for the teachers during the games. The mutual learning and teaching situation of the student and the teacher that we are used to will disappear.

Vu and Peters (2021) claim that vocabulary is the main point of English language teaching. Without knowing sufficient vocabulary, learners will not understand others or explain their ideas. The reason they claim this is that students who cannot reach a certain amount of vocabulary will have problems expressing themselves to the people they are dealing with and understanding the people they are talking to. Sukurova (2021) points out that games make classes more interesting and exciting. They help enrich the vocabulary knowledge of learners. In this study, it is emphasized that the games played in the classrooms change the

lesson from a monotonous atmosphere to the students' pleasure. Moreover, when people are busy with something they like, they will enjoy it, and helps their self-development.

Teachers have a lot more to do these days in classes than they did even just a few decades ago. It can be hard to get both teachers and students interested in something in the classroom, too. Professional teachers need to know the most up-to-date teaching methods and technology, as well as how to lead and manage other people. Teachers should be more enthusiastic, patient, and inspiring if they want to make a big difference in how well their students do in school (Yildiz, 2015). For example, a low level of students' spoken English is the result of a lack of motivation to study the language (Yildiz, 2019). It is common knowledge that a learning environment that aims to increase the motivation of the learners with high motivation has a positive effect on learning, whereas factors that are supposed to negatively affect the motivation of the learners with low motivation cause the learning to be defined as a failure, such as not reaching the academic targets (Celik & Yildiz, 2019). Battistella and Wangenheim (2016) noted games are considered a useful instructional constraint for an objective method and are believed to result in a large number of benefits, increasing learning effectiveness, interest, motivation, and persistence. No moment in our life passes without games. Successful educators will achieve unexpected success if they examine enough, combine games with lessons and actively integrate them into learning.

However, Battistella and Wangenheim (2016) warn that the games should be regarded as supplementary activities. When choosing a game, educators should be careful to find an appropriate one for the need of the class in terms of language and type of participation. We understand that it is not possible to apply any game directly in the classroom. Teachers should choose the materials, words, objects, and games to be used in the classroom according to the level of the students. It is pointed out that even if they are parallel classes, the activity we do for one group may not fit the level of the other groups. If we do not pay attention to this, we will harm our students while trying to benefit.

Pivec and Kearney (2007) approached the issue differently. They stated that by using online games and especially digital educational games learners should be able to conduct factual knowledge, learn on demand, and gain experiences in the virtual world that can later shape their behavioral patterns and directly affect their reflection. Educational games and simulations are experiential exercises that transport learners to another world. There they apply their knowledge, skills, and strategies in the execution of their assigned roles (Gredler, 2013). For example, learners may search for vocabulary cues to capture a wicked wizard game, or engineers may diagnose the problems in a malfunctioning steam plant.

In today's world, it is online games and many articles have been written about them. online games have been receiving much attention in educational settings. These articles reveal the truth, no matter how much we try to keep our children away from the digital world as parents, we will not be successful. This is because we live in a digital age today and we should try to teach our children how to use technology correctly as much as we can.

From Alqahtani's (2015) personal experience over many years he has been teaching in his own country and he states that he has become more and more aware that some of the most basic rules of vocabulary teaching and learning have been forgotten or ignored. Additionally, he states that although teaching still concerns more about grammar than vocabulary, students majoring in English rely heavily on their

knowledge of vocabulary rather than on their knowledge of grammar in learning English. The more vocabulary students have at their disposal, the better they learn, no matter their grammatical knowledge, even though this isn't to say that they should ignore grammar completely. Seashore (1948) put forward a different study on this subject. He suggested that the number and speed of people's vocabulary learning change according to the periods of life and asked the following questions.

How many words should a child know at different ages? For example, when he enters school at the age of six, teachers, research specialists, and textbook writers generally tell us that the 1st-grade child knows, at least, several thousand words. Actual experiments show that they know about 17,000 basic words besides 7,000 derivatives.

Children have the ability to learn vocabulary quickly. Professional educators usually estimate the average gain as a few. Thus, there are probably a thousand words per year. They expressed their ideas on how to expand their vocabulary during the year, and how to develop their capacity to grasp more words. Most writers indicate that human abilities reach their peak in the late teens or early twenties and tend to decline gradually thereafter.

Brooks et al. (2021) conducted a study that revealed how the importance of knowing a word makes a difference in reading passages, and the following conclusions were reached. Results show that differences in vocabulary knowledge show more variance in reading comprehension scores than the other factors examined in this study, highlighting the importance of vocabulary knowledge for reading comprehension. As it can be understood from here, the richer students' vocabulary, the more easily they can understand reading passages.

If we narrow things down a little more and consider them on a country-wide basis, in Arabia Bakhsh (2016) achieved striking results in research he conducted. Like any other children, Saudis accept new foreign languages easily, but they get bored very fast if the teachers are teaching them using the old conventional methods and techniques. Vocabulary is the basic part and a key element of learning any language. Teaching vocabulary using games has become crucially important for English language learners because they sustain enjoyment and interest in learning and encourage using the language in a fearless and creative. In another academic research which was conducted in Turkey, Melek (2013) stated that French as a foreign language should be taught to children using games, which are classroom activities. In addition, she emphasized that the desire to learn a foreign language is increasing day by day, and educators should be careful. She reported that students should be ready for education both physically and mentally while teaching a foreign language. At this stage, he emphasized that there should be a difference between the lessons given to adults and the lessons taught to young students. As can be understood from here, when the fun is not included in education, students can get bored quickly and break away from the lesson. It can be concluded that, no matter how good our students are, we as teachers, have to make the lesson more fun.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This research was applied in English preparatory classes at a private university in Iraq. A total of 18 students aged 18 to 20 participated in this study. 7 of those students were male and 11 of them were female

and all of them were of Kurdish nationality. Three students were unable to attend the pre-test and post-test for various reasons. All the students were intermediate in English and had no problem in expressing themselves according to Oxford Placement Test.

3.2 Materials

Mime game is easy to play and does not require much preparation. This research was applied by considering the words in the Scope book by the Oxford publishing company used in the preparatory class and consisted of 4 stages.

1. Vocabulary quiz in Google form without using Mime games as a pre-test
2. Vocabulary quiz in Google form by using Mime games as a post-test
3. The questionnaire about vocabulary games from students
4. A face-to-face survey with students about the games used in the lesson

3.3 Vocabulary Quiz in Google Form Without Using Mime Games (Pre-Test)

In the first step of our research, the method traditionally used by teachers was applied. It is commonly known, words that are important in reading passages are highlighted differently from the others. These words were opened on the smart board and their explanations were given with the help of the students. At this stage, no game activity was applied. In the last 5 minutes of the lesson, a quiz consisting of 8 questions on the Google Form was shared with the students. After this stage, the link to the questions was sent to the students. Afterward, the students answered the questions without any help or influence.

3.4 Vocabulary Quiz in Google Form by Using Mime Games (Post-Test)

At this stage, as in the other stages, 8 words related to the subject were selected. At the beginning of the lesson, these words were emphasized, and their explanations were made. Unlike the first application, one of the learners was called to the board and a word was given in a way that other learners could not see. In Mime Game, the learner must express the given word to other learners using body language without using any oral expressions. This technique had such an advantage on students since the student who told the word added body language to the event, and the word he wanted to explain became permanent in their memory. On the other hand, students who tried to find the word, as they saw something visually and had a chance to look at the event from a different perspective. After all the words were explained with the Mime Game technique, an 8-question quiz was shared with the students via google form as in the previous exam.

3.5 The Questionnaire About Vocabulary Games from Students

In this study, a questionnaire called the importance of games in vocabulary teaching was presented to the students via Google Forms. The reason why it is done via Google form, all students use smartphones and analysis can be done very quickly. The language questionnaire was prepared in English, and it was made over 6 questions. After each question, the participants were presented with 3 answer options: agree, partially agree, and disagree. Before starting the survey, the students were informed about the purpose of

the survey, and it was stated that it would only be used for research purposes and that the information obtained from it would not be used anywhere by using a name.

3.6 A Face-To-Face Survey with Students About the Games Used in The Lesson

At this stage, a 3-question survey was prepared for the students. The questions were generally asked about what the students thought about the word games played in the lessons. For this study, the course hours of the students weren't taken; on the contrary, the survey was conducted by considering the break times. After asking the questions during the survey, the answers given by the students were noted.

3.7 Procedure

The study lasted approximately 8 weeks. In the first weeks, students were only observed. Since more efficient results were obtained in the vocabulary lessons in which the game was played, such a study was applied. For this study, preparatory classes with intermediate English levels were selected. The class in which the experiments were conducted consisted of 11 girls and 7 boys. In this study, which consisted of two parts, the same student groups were used. The reason for this was to get the right results.

In the first stage, the classical method of teaching vocabulary was employed by the students. In general, the lessons were covered in the form of explaining the words and taking notes. At the end of the lesson, a quiz of 8 questions was shared with the students via Google Form.

In the second stage, as in the first stage, the words were explained, unlike the first section, Mime Game was applied in this section and the students tried to explain the words to their friends using their body language. In the next stage, an 8-question quiz was shared with the students over the Google Form in the last 10 minutes of the lesson. The students answered the questions freely without being under any pressure.

In the 3rd stage, a previously prepared questionnaire called "The importance of games in vocabulary lessons" consisting of 6 questions was shared with the students. Before sharing, the necessary information about the questionnaire was given to the students.

Finally, in the 4th stage, a questionnaire consisting of 5 questions was taken from the students. At this stage, face-to-face questions were asked, and the questions given by the students were recorded in the form of notes.

4. Results

The results of 2 different quizzes applied to the students were examined and these results were supported by 2 different questionnaires. Participants in the study were generally between the ages of 18-20. The gender ratio of the participants is as seen in the table below.

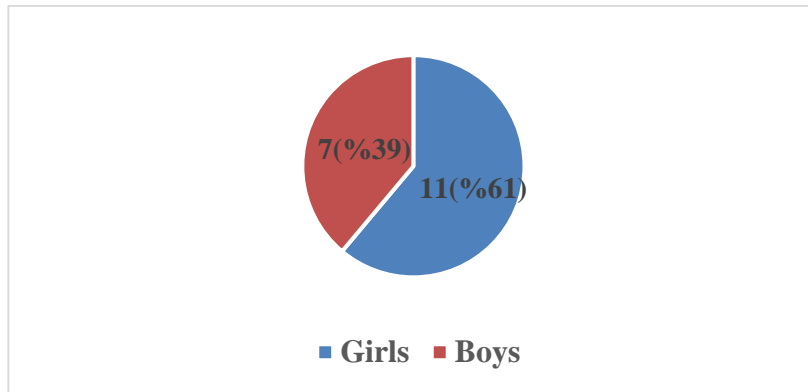


Table 1: The gender percentage of the participants

A total of 18 students participated in this study, 11 of them were girls and 7 of them were boys.

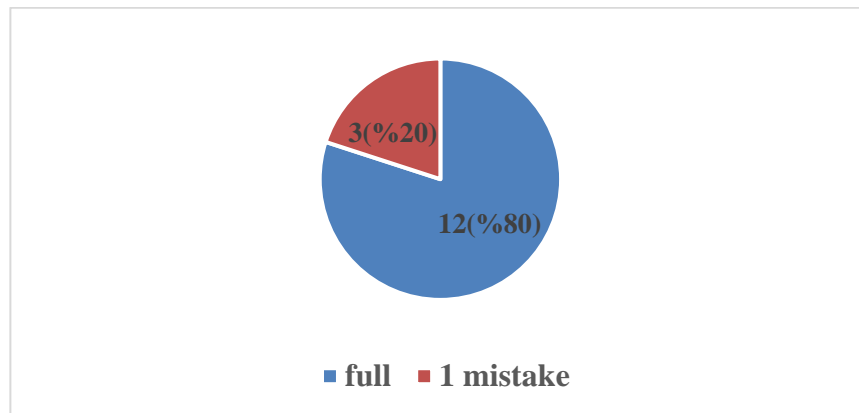


Table 2: The results of Pre-Test without using mime games

The results of the vocabulary teaching quiz with classical methods, which is the first step of our study, are as above. A total of 15 students and participants participated in this quiz, and 12 of these participants answered all of the questions correctly, only three students made one mistake. This data shows that the classical method still works.

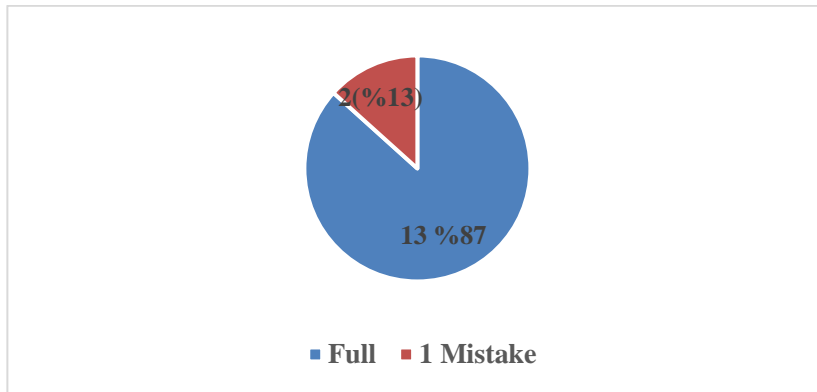


Table 3: The results of Post Test using mime games

This table shows the results of the quiz made by applying Mime Game. If we compare with the previous table, the success rate of students increases from eighty percent to eighty-seven percent. To get a more efficient result, we increased the difficulty level of the second exam consciously, but still, it turned out that the lessons with games were more productive than the others.

In the third part of our research, we applied a questionnaire to learn the students' thoughts about the vocabulary game. Our survey consists of 6 questions and a total of 13 students participated in the questions and results are as follows.

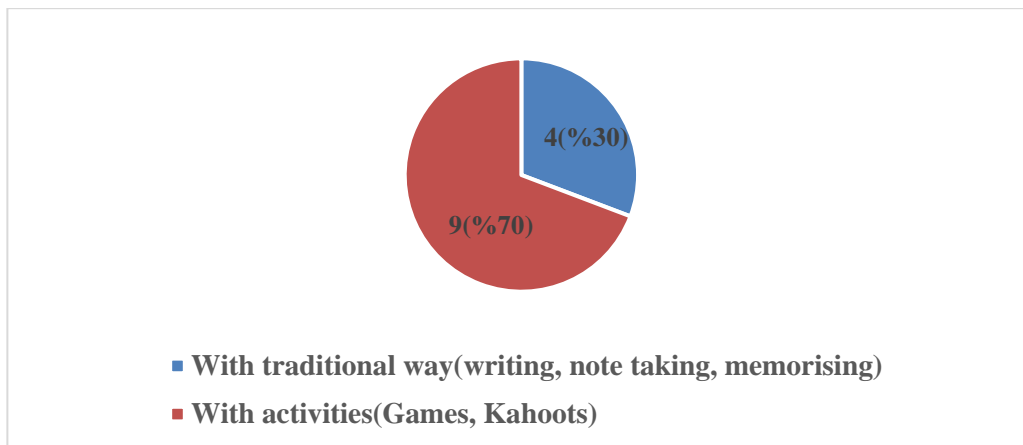


Table 4: How do the teachers teach vocabulary at your school?

These data give us the truth, that seventy percent of the educators in the institution where the research was conducted make their lessons interactive with games. 30 percent of them teach their lessons with classical methods.

Table 5: Students' responses to the questionnaire

Statements	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
Games used in lessons help me learn better	92,3 %	7,7 %	0 %
Games help our speaking skills	76,9 %	23,1 %	0 %
Games improve my self-confidence	61,5 %	30,8 %	7,7 %
Games make the lessons more exciting	100 %	0 %	0 %
Games used in lessons are so boring.	84,6 %	7,7 %	7,7 %

We can reach the following conclusion by looking at the results of the students' survey. More than eighty percent of the participants are happier when they play games, and they enjoy the lessons more.

At the end of our study, a face-to-face survey was taken from the participants. A total of 3 questions were asked in the survey and 5 students were included in the survey. The answers given by the participants to the questions we conveyed are as follows.

Q1. What is your opinion about the games played in vocabulary lessons?

S1	Magnificent, words become more permanent.
S2	I like it because we can exchange information.
S3	Makes boring lessons fun.
S4	Good for some students but noisy for others.
S5	We can communicate with friends, and it changes the course of the lesson.

Q2. What is the difference between the lessons with games and without games?

Students	With Games	Without Games
S1	You can test your memory	They are quite boring
S2	It is very interesting because there is a competition	I don't understand without games
S3	Better and funny	Very serious and boring
S4	It goes faster	The lesson does not end
S5	I feel happier	It is not my style

Q3. How do you feel when your teacher calls you to play a game?

S1	I feel proud.
S2	I feel shy in front of my other friends.
S3	I feel happy because my friends are learning from me.
S4	Helps me overcome my shyness.
S5	It is ok for me.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

As a result of long studies, the following conclusions have been reached. Lessons with games are more fun and more productive than lessons without games. Charsky and Ressler (2011) stated that, in the lessons taught with games, the motivation of the students increased, and their learning became more permanent. Now all educators must accept the fact that today's generations are not happy with the old techniques and classical methods. Ibrahim (2017) stated that Language games can help students in building a good relationship with the new language. For this reason, he stated that Curricula designers should include enough games in their lesson plans. He also emphasized that teachers should step out of their role of dominating the classroom and assisting students in language learning. As educators, we should research more and not fall behind the times. If our students are talking about sports, we should know at least a word or two about this subject. In this study, very striking results were obtained based on the collected data.

1. Students, who are generally passive in class, stumble upon a different identity during playtime. When it's their turn to play, they get excited and try to explain the words as best they can. In this way, they can join their friends more and improve themselves.
2. Another issue we have observed is that the number of students being late for class and absenteeism has gradually decreased, and of course, this is very important for teachers.
3. Academically, the students' speaking skills increased, and their ability to express themselves improved.
4. Another happy result is that the exam results of the students increased visibly. In this way, we gained happier faces and more active students.
5. Thanks to the games, the classrooms left a boring environment and turned into a fun environment.
6. In addition, the games help to break the ice between the teacher and the student.

6. Suggestions for Further Research

This research was conducted on a total of 18 students and was applied to a class. We believe that clearer results can be achieved if the number of students and classes is increased in subsequent similar studies. And also, we have completed our research on a single game, but we do not doubt that more useful results will be obtained than research using more diverse games. Another point we would like to add is that we think using two different classes while applying the quizzes will give more precise results. When a single class is used, the results can be close.

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