Does Using Language Games Affect Vocabulary Learning in EFL Classes?

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Abstract: The present study attempted to investigate the role of using word games in L2 vocabulary acquisition. 12 female participants from Uludag University were selected for control and experimental groups. Additionally, 35 participants from different universities in Turkey were invited to attend the study. First, an online questionnaire about the effect of games on vocabulary learning was administered to 35 participants. And results were analysed. Secondly, 12 female participants were divided into two groups as control group and experimental group. Both groups were taught certain words, however, a word game known as "Bingo" were utilized for the experimental group. Finally, a vocabulary quiz was administered to both groups to determine the differences between them. The scores obtained from vocabulary quiz showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in vocabulary quiz. Even so, there was not a significant difference between the results of the quiz. Similarly, the findings of the questionnaire indicated that the participants preferred learning through vocabulary games rather than traditional way. Also, the findings revealed that games reduce negative feelings during the learning process. It was suggested that teachers should reconsider the role of games and appreciate their educational value.

Keywords: Vocabulary Learning and Teaching, Language Games, Vocabulary Games, Traditional Vocabulary Teaching, EFL.

Introduction

Language is the most important part of our life and vocabulary is the most important element of language. "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". That is what David Wilkins (1972) said on the importance of vocabulary. Many years ago, traditional ways were chosen in vocabulary teaching. For example in the GTM (Grammar Translation Method), vocabulary was taught in the form of lists of isolated words. Students were given a

lot of words and were asked to memorize them immediately. This process was very tiring and boring for students. Also, words which were taught in this way could be forgotten quickly. They were not practised enough. They were not related to students' interests. Nowadays, this situation has changed. A lot of techniques have become available and used in vocabulary teaching. There are many options to teach vocabulary. One of them is teaching vocabulary by using language games. Although some teachers may think that language games are a waste of time, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. Games can help teachers to create contexts in which language is meaningful. According to Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis, input should be comprehensible. He says that we acquire language in only one way, when we understand messages, that is, when we obtain comprehensible input. Thus, we acquire when we understand what people tell us or what we read, when we are absorbed in the message. Comprehensible input means that students should be able to understand the essence of what is being said or presented to them. At this point, games can help teachers to make input comprehensible. Students can learn vocabulary in comprehensible way by the help of language games. They can be aware of what they learn. Besides, in the learning process, having psychologic barriers is a serious problem. Teachers can break down these barriers by using language games because students feel happy and free while playing. Language games help students to decrease their stress which affects their learning process negatively. Games can help and encourage students to sustain their interest. Thanks to games, students can give importance to what they do and learn. If students have fun while learning vocabulary, words which they learn can be more permanent. Also, motivation is very important for students' learning. When they play games, they get rid of limited atmosphere in the classroom. Because, during games, they feel as if the classroom is a playground instead of a formal and strict place where they have to stay for learning and obeying rules. Thus, they get pleasure from what they do. In addition to this advantage of language games, they promote students' interaction while playing. Even a shy student can take part in games. For these reasons, this study investigated whether games really help students to

memorize words effectively and more simply than usual way, such as reading, listening or repeating the words after the teacher.

Literature Review

Vocabulary is one of the most important language elements that support the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. McCarty (1990) points out that no matter how well the students learn grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wider range of meanings, communication in L2 cannot just happen in any meaningful way. Therefore, vocabulary learning skills are maybe the most useful ones that are empowred by the individual learning strategies. Vocabulary learning strategies are the actions, set of techniques or language learning behaviours that learners take to help themselves to discover the meaning of new words and retain them in long-term memory (Cameron, 2001; Intraprasert, 2004; Hamzah, et.al, 2009).

Many studies have been carried out about the effect of using games on vocabulary learning. For example, Kalaycıoglu (2011) conducted a study to investigate the effectiveness of the educational games as a technique in the preschool-level English vocabulary learning. In a four-week period, totally 24 vocabulary items were presented with picture cards. In the experimental group, picture vocabulary games were used while the control group did not receive picture vocabulary games. At the end, t-test was conducted. Results indicated a significant difference in English vocabulary achievement in favor of the experimental group which was taught by the educational picture vocabulary games with a large effect size. According to Kalaycıoglu (2011), more picture vocabulary games should be devised for very young learners by the experts for the classroom use and the number of the books about educational vocabulary games should be increased. Likewise, Al Masri&Al Najar (2014) researched the effect of using word games on primary stage students' achievement in English vocabulary and concluded that games are proven to be useful and effective and that they should be used for teaching vocabulary to very young learners.

Another study was conducted by Mehregan (2014). The study investigated the impact of language games on the vocabulary achievement of Iranian learners. The findings of the study showed that the game based experimental group outperformed the comparison group in vocabulary achievement. Similarly, Taheri (2014) examined the effect of using language games on elementary students' vocabulary retention. What has been concerned in this research was whether or not using language games can make any effect on the improvement of elementary EFL Iranian learners' vocabulary retention. It was concluded that using language games has very significant effect in vocabulary retention and recall of the participants.

Schwienhorst (2002) has noted that games provide realistic sociocultural context for language learning. The purpose of another research was to find out whether or not vocabulary games enhance vocabulary learning and which games offer more vocabulary enhancement to L2 learners (Maria&Othman, 2015). As a result, vocabulary games not only help students memorize but they also trigger interest in learning. It was reported that games including homonyms would be the most useful ones for the students compared to crossword puzzle and wordsearch. Tuan (2012) suggested that teachers should recognize that games are also a form of learning stressing their part in learning. He also added that exercises in workbook can help young learners recollect vocabulary to some extent, but it will be more effective if teachers add more games in class to motivate young learners in learning vocabulary. Similarly, another research attempted to find whether using games has an impact in teaching English to children (Wang, Shang, and Briody,2011). Wang et al. (2011) suggested that using games may promote children's motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and reduce their anxiety from peer pressure.

Alemi (2010) mentioned that one of the most diffucult aspects of learning a foreign language is the retention of vocabulary. She also indicated that scholars suggest many techniques for learning and games are one of them. In the light of the results, it was reported that using word games have positive effect on vocabulary development of third-grade junior high school students. Additionally, it was indicated that since

different students took roles in the games, they suggested words or meaning of the words differently or from a different perspective. This gave the other students different ways of thinking about the suggestion. This is an important viewpoint on games. Aslanabadi (2013) evaluated the effect of games on improvement of Iranian EFL vocabulary knowledge in kindergartens. The study indicated that there are statistically significant differences in mean scores of vocabulary test in favor of the experimental group. The result with the experimental group was superior to those of the control group. Another study concentrated on the role of word games in second language acquisition (Ojeda, 2004). In this research, the experimental groups used games on four occasions. The control groups undertook more traditional pedagogical activities. The qualitative evidence suggested that word games may prove to be an effective tool in second language acquisition if the games are challenging, if they fulfill a pedagogic goal, and if they engage the learner to participate actively.

Regarding the numerous evidences related to the importance and benefit of using games in vocabulary acquisition in the related literature, the main purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. Can using language games affect vocabulary learning positively in EFL classes?
2. Are there any differences between the learners who learn words by the help of games and learners who learn words in traditional ways?

Methodology

Participants

47 university students learning English as a foreign language were invited to participate in this study. L1 of all participants was Turkish. Participants were randomly selected. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21 years old. The overwhelming majority of them were females. (74.5% females and 25.5% males). 12 female students from Uludag University were selected for the control group (N=6) and the experimental group (N=6). The proficiency level of the participants in the two groups was beginner. Apart from these groups, 35 students from different universities in Turkey participated in this study by answering the questions in the questionnaire.

Their proficiency level varied between beginner and advanced (65,7% beginner, 28,6% intermediate, 5,7% advanced).

Materials

The data were conducted by means of a questionnaire and a vocabulary quiz that were prepared by the researcher. Also, the vocabulary bingo game and a video about vegetables and fruits were used in this study for the experimental group.

Vocabulary Bingo game

This technique provides a unique opportunity for students to self-assess their progress in learning professional vocabulary and for a teacher to assess students' progress informally, without causing stress and anxiety (Kavaliauskienë, 2000). Vocabulary bingo game in this study consists of game cards, bingo markers and vocabulary cards pocket. On the game cards, there are pictures of words and English vegetable and fruit names. 3x3 bingo cards were utilized in this study. So, in total there were 9 target words on each game card. Above the each fruit or vegetable name, there was picture of a word. When it comes to the bingo markers, they are small pieces of paper for students to put on the game cards when participants have a word that is announced. A small picture of the sun was used in this study as a marker. Finally, vocabulary cards pocket was a pocket in which there were several small vocabulary cards. A Turkish word was chosen from the pocket and then it was announced to the class or students.

The questionnaire

A questionnaire titled as *İngilizce Kelime Öğreniminde Oyunların Etkisi* (The Effect of the Games in English Vocabulary Learning) was used in this research. It was designed by the help of google forms by the researcher. The questionnaire was prepared in Turkish because some participants' proficiency level was beginner. It consisted of 16 items in total. It included multiple-choice options such as agree, partially agree, disagree and a question prepared in a form of Likert scale. The participants were asked to give a point between 1(less) and 5 (more) considering the

contribution of games to vocabulary learning. Before answering the questions, the participants were informed about the aim of the questionnaire. It was assured that data gained from this questionnaire would not be used for different aims and personal data were kept private. The questionnaire was composed of two parts. In the beginning of the questionnaire, there were demographical questions including sex, age group and proficiency level of the participants. In the second part of the questionnaire, there were questions about the effect of the games in vocabulary learning. Also, the vocabulary teaching styles which participants were exposed to in their previous learning period were asked in the questionnaire. Finally, each participant's preference (traditional vocabulary learning or with games) was asked.

The vocabulary quiz

Vocabulary quiz was designed by the researcher to apply to both the control and experimental groups. The vocabulary quiz was about vegetable and fruit names. A lot of pictures were presented to participants. Each picture had a circle for participants to tick. In the quiz, a situation about shopping was given to the participants. There was a shopping list. Participants were asked to tick the pictures of vegetables and fruits in the list.

Procedure

The present research was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the study focused on the experimental and control groups. Each group consisted of 6 participants from Uludag University and their linguistic proficiency was same, beginner level. The list of the target words was presented to the control group to read and memorize. On the other hand, the same words were presented to the experimental group with a video dealing with fruits and vegetables. Then, words were reinforced with the bingo game. The participants were divided into two groups of three. Each group had game cards on which there were English names of vegetables and fruits and pictures. Then, the researcher randomly selected a word from the pocket and announced the word. The words in the pocket were in Turkish. And the group who covered all words on the cards with markers was the winner.

Finally, the data were conducted by means of a vocabulary quiz. The quiz was applied to both groups.

In the second phase of the study, the questionnaire addressing the participants' opinions about the effect of the games on vocabulary learning was handed to each participant in their L1. Also, every explanation was provided to participants in their native language. The questinnare was conveyed to the participants by sharing the link of the questionnaire. So, a lot of partcipants from different universities in Turkey could take part in the study. Completion of the questionnaire took approximately a minute per person. And, the results were obtained immediately thanks to the google forms service.

Results

The quantitative data, obtained from the participants' answers to the questions in the questionnaire about the effect of using games in vocabulary learning process were examined. The findings were supported by the results of the questionnaire. The questions in the first part of the questionnaire were about the demographic information of the participants. The first question was asked to the participants to learn their sex. Most of the participants were female (n=23) while the male participants were minority in the current study (n=12). Besides the sex, the age range of the participants was asked in the second question of the first part. Most participants' ages ranged from 18 to 21. Table 1 shows the sex and percentage of the age range of the participants.

Table 1. The sex and percentage of the age range of the participants.

Female	Male	Age Range	Percentage
2	0	15-18	5,7%
19	10	19-21	82,9%
2	2	22-24	11,4%

The third question in the questionnaire was about the participants's proficiency level. Most of them were beginner level (65,7%). The percentages of other proficiency levels were presented in the participants section of the present paper.

The second part of the questionnaire was about the effect of using games in vocabulary learning. In the first question, participants' previous vocabulary learning experiences were questionned. Table 2 indicates the results of the first question in the second part.

Table 2: The answers of the question *Girdiğiniz İngilizce derslerinde kelime öğretimi nasıldı? (How were vocabulary lessons carried out in your classes?)*
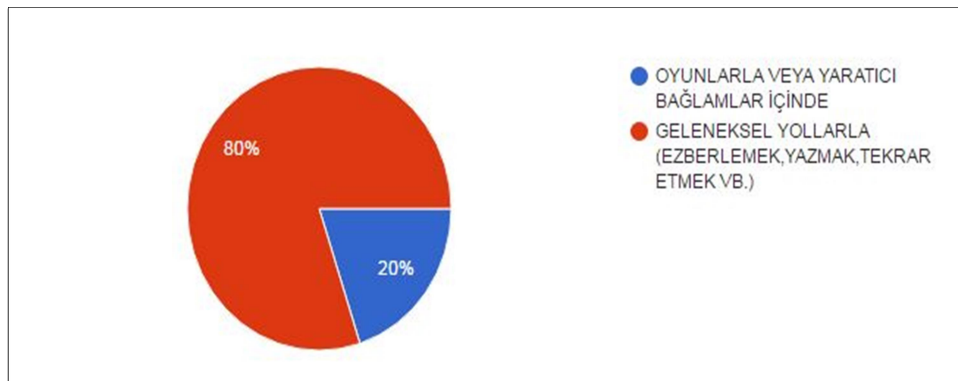
These findings pointed out that vocabulary learning in Turkey is based on traditional ways. The 80% of the participants indicated that they had traditional classes (i.e. memorising, note taking, rehearsing, etc.). Only 20% of the participants said that they had games or some other activities within creative contexts.

In the rest of the questionnaire, different situations were presented to the participants, and they were invited to evaluate these situations according to their opinions. Three options were utilized in the questionnaire: agree, partially agree, and disagree. Next question was about the effect of games on the creativity of the students.

Table 3: The effect of using games on creativity.
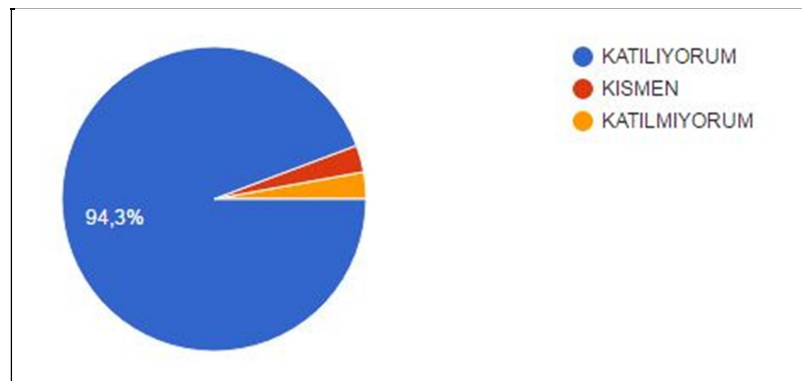
According to the anwers, it was observed that a dominating number of the participants (n=33, 94.3%) believed that games in vocabulary learning foster creativity. On the other hand, one participant stated patial agreement, and one participant stated that games do not affect creativity. Additionally, participants were asked whether games develop the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. 80% of the participants agreed, while the remaining 20% agreed but partially. Nobody disagreed. Table 4 states the answers as follows:

Table 4: The opinions of the participants about the situation given in the questionnaire: *Oyunlar konuşma-yazma-okuma-dinleme becerilerinin gelişmesini sağlar. (Games help in developing the four language skills.)*
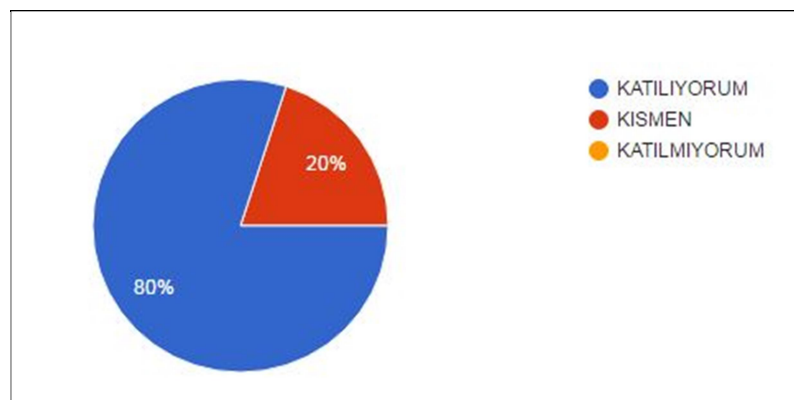
Another situation given to the students was about the effect of using games in communication and cooperation. Table 5 shows the findings.

Table 5. The participants' answers to the situation *Oyunlar öğrencileri iletişime ve işbirliğine yönlendirir. (Games promote the communication and cooperation of the students.)*
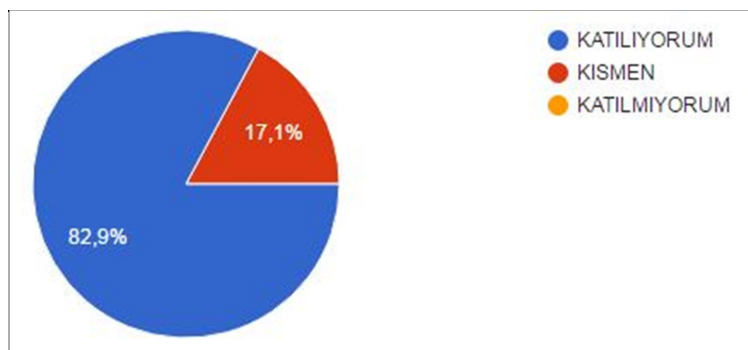
Depending on the data presented in Table 5, it was observed that nobody expressed that games do not prompt students to communicate and cooperate. Almost 83% of the participants agreed that games promote communication and cooperation, and the remaining 17% agreed partially. The subsequent situations and participants' opinions are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Participants' opinions with regard to the given statements.

Situations	Agree	Partially Agree	Diasgree
"Oyunlar kelime öğrenimini anlamlı kılar." Games make vocabulary learning meaningful.	82,9%	17,1%	0%
"Oyunlar öğrenilen kelimenin kalıcılığını arttırır." Games enhance the permanence of word which is learnt.	77,1%	20%	2,9%
"Oyunlar kelimenin bir bağlam içinde sunulmasını sağlar." Games provide that words can be presented in a contextualised way.	66,7%	30,3%	3%
"Öğrencinin motivasyonunu arttırır." Games promote the students' motivation.	82,9%	17,1%	0%

"Oyunlar öğrenilen kelimenin anlamlı bağlam içerisinde kullanılmasını sağlar." Games provide that the word which is learnt can be used in meaningful context.	71,4%	25,7%	2,9%
"Sadece kelimeleri okumak kelime öğreniminde etkilidir." Only reading words is efficient in vocabulary learning.	2,9%	34,3%	62,9%
"Okuyup ezberleme ile öğrendiğim kelimeler uzun zaman aklımda kalıyor." Words which I learn by reading and memorizing stick in my mind for a long time.	2,9%	51,4%	45,7%

In the penultimate question of the questionnaire, participants were asked which one they preferred in vocabulary learning; using the words that they learn by playing games, or through traditional ways like reading, memorization, etc. Results are provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Vocabulary learning preferences of the participants.
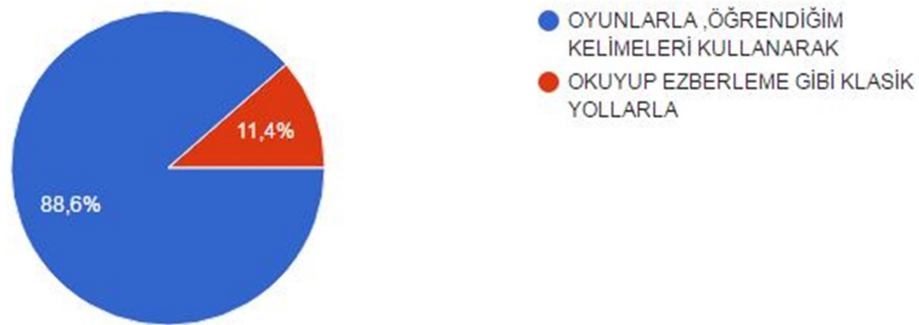
The results in Table 7 clearly indicate that most participants (n=31, 88,6%) prefer learning vocabulary by playing games. Only 11,4% of the participants said that they prefer the traditional approaches.

Finally, the participants were asked if there is a positive effect of using games in vocabulary learning. The criteria for evaluating the results of the final item in the

questionnaire were determined on a scale of 1 to 5 similar to the Likert scale as follows:

1-ineffective   2-poor   3-moderate   4-effective   5-very effitive

It was determined that any record below 4 would be evaluated as an indicator of low efficiency while 4 and over would be evaluated as sufficient. Results of this item are displayed graphically in Table 8.

Table 8. The evaluation of the participants related to the effect of games in vocabulary learning.
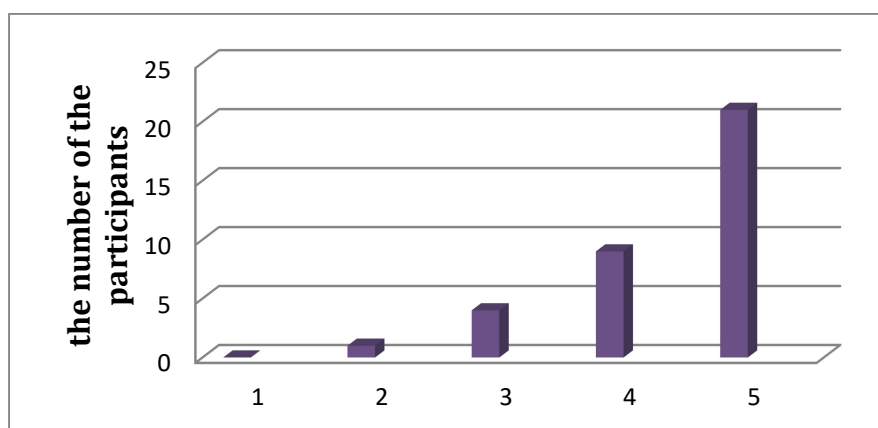
Most of the participants (n=21) reported that games affect vocabulary learning positively. These findings answered our first research question: *Can using language games affect vocabulary learning positively in EFL classes?* When the results were examined, it was noticed that using language games in EFL classes affect vocabulary learning positively.

Results of the Vocabulary Quiz

A vocabulary quiz which was worth 10 points was implemented to the control and experimental groups. According to the quantitative results derived from the quiz, there are no significant differences between the participants in the control group (m=8,16) and experimental group (m=9). (see Table 9 and 10). Even so, the experimental group outperformed the control group.

Table 9. The mean scores of the participants in the control group.

Control	Scores
Participant 1	9
Participant 2	7
Participant 3	10
Participant 4	7
Participant 5	8
Participant 6	10

Table 10. The mean scores of the participants in the experimental group.

Experimental	Scores
Participant 1	10
Participant 2	8
Participant 3	10
Participant 4	9
Participant 5	7
Participant 6	10

The results presented in Table 9 and 10 demonstrated that the experimental group was relatively more succesful than the control group. These results enlightened the second research question: *Are there any differences between the learners who learn words by the help of games and learners who learn words in traditional ways?* Also, the participants in the experimental group stated that they had a good time and they were not bored while playing vocabulary game, which can be regarded as a significant qualitative finding to be taken into consideration seriously.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to investigate the effect of games on vocabulary learning in EFL classes. The results of the questionnaire answered the research question 1. When the participants were asked their previous vocabulary learning

experience, most of them stated that they learned new words in traditional ways. Therefore, we can say that using games in vocabulary teaching is not a widespread way in Turkey, although most of the participants agree that playing game in vocabulary learning enhances creativity and motivation of students. In addition, Masri and Najar (2014) demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of pupils found games relaxing and motivating. Uberman (1998), for example, observed the enthusiasm of her students in learning through games. Moreover, it was reported that a large number of the participants regard playing games as an opportunity to use new words which are learnt. Uberman (op cit.) pointed out her opinion about games by saying that word games are a way to help students not only enjoy and entertain with the language they learn, but also to practice it incidentally.

Another result of the study showed that games prompt students to collaborate with their peers. This is consistent with the study conducted by Mehregan (2014) who revealed that game-based approach provided a sort of task-based approach in which learners cooperate and work together. According to the responses of the participants, learning vocabulary by only reading words is not a preferred style because they think that words they learn by reading are not remembered after a while.

Finally, the results of the last item in the questionnaire answered the research question 1 directly. In relation to research question 1, most of the participants reported that games affect vocabulary learning in EFL classes positively. On the other hand, there were participants who did not believe that games foster creativity and enhance the permanence of the words which are learnt. Although they are a minority (only two people), this was an unexpected result.

The results of the vocabulary quiz provided parallel results with the questionnaire findings. These results supplied an answer to the research question 2. When the results were analysed, it was noticed that the experimental group was relatively more successful than the control group with regard to the scores in the vocabulary quiz. Although no significant difference was observed between the results of the two

groups, the findings of the present study showed that the game based experimental group outperformed the comparison group in vocabulary achievement. As indicated by Uberman (1998), games are useful and more successful than other methods of vocabulary presentation and revision. In addition to the scores of the experimental group, the participants in this group stated that they had a great time. This refers to the finding of Masri and Najar (2014) who stated that games should be an integral part of a lesson, providing the possibility of intensive practice while at the same time immensely enjoyable for both students and teachers.

Conclusion

The concern of the present study was whether or not using language games can make any effect on vocabulary learning in EFL classes. It is sometimes proposed that games are just for fun and they have very little effect in teaching and learning. However, this research revealed that games contribute to vocabulary learning if they give students a chance to learn and practice the language. To conclude, learning vocabulary through games was observed to be a significant and interesting way that can be applied for language learners. The results of the study suggest that games are used not only for making learners successful in EFL classes, but more importantly, for motivating the learners and increasing the cooperation among them. In the light of the findings, it is evident that using games may promote motivation and vocabulary acquisition.

These findings should have pedagogical implications. Especially, it was detected that mostly the traditional ways were used in Turkey for vocabulary learning. This situation should be changed because results of the questionnaire suggest that most learners prefer to learn new English words with games rather than traditional ways. Based on the results, it is recommended that games should be used in vocabulary learning and teaching.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study showed that games affect vocabulary learning positively. Also, it seems that games have a significant effect on success and motivation. Nonetheless, there are some limitations in the present study. One of these might be the number of the participants. It would be better if the topic was analysed with a larger number of participants. Also, in the further investigations, it might be useful to research which types of games are more effective in vocabulary learning in EFL classes or which age groups are more enthusiastic while playing games.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Değerli Katılımcılar,

Bu anket İngilizce kelime öğreniminde oyunların etkisini araştırmak amacı ile hazırlanmıştır. Sizlerden alınan bilgiler sadece bu araştırma için kullanılacak ve gizli kalacaktır. Şimdiden katılımınız için teşekkür ederim.

1. BÖLÜM

Cinsiyetiniz:	Yaşınız:	İngilizce seviyeniz:
o Kadın	o 15-18	o Başlangıç düzeyi
o Erkek	o 18-21	o Orta düzey
	o 21-24	o İleri düze

2. BÖLÜM

Girdiğiniz ingilizce derslerinde kelime öğretimi nasıldı?

o Oyunlarla veya yaratıcı bağlamlar içinde

o Geleneksel yollarla (ezberlemek, yazmak, tekrar etmek vb.)

AŞAĞIDAKİ DURUMLARI KENDİ DÜŞÜNCELERİNİZE GÖRE CEVAPLAYINIZ.

Oyunlar dil öğreniminde yaratıcılığı arttırır.

o Katılıyorum

o Kısmen

o Katılmıyorum

Oyunlar konuşma-yazma-okuma-dinleme becerilerinin gelişmesini sağlar.

o Katılıyorum

o Kısmen

o Katılmıyorum

Oyunlar öğrencileri iletişime ve işbirliğine yönlendirir.

o Katılıyorum

o Kısmen

o Katılmıyorum

Oyunlar kelime öğrenimini anlamlı kılar.

o Katılıyorum

o Kısmen

o Katılmıyorum

Oyunlar öğrenilen kelimenin kalıcılığını arttırır.

o   Katılıyorum

o   Kısmen

o   Katılmıyorum

Oyunlar kelimenin bir bağlam içinde sunulmasını sağlar.

o   Katılıyorum

o   Kısmen

o   Katılmıyorum

Öğrencinin motivasyonunu arttırır.

o   Katılıyorum

o   Kısmen

o   Katılmıyorum

Oyunlar öğrenilen kelimenin anlamlı bağlam içerisinde kullanılmasını sağlar.

o   Katılıyorum

o   Kısmen

o   Katılmıyorum

Sadece kelimeleri okumak kelime öğreniminde etkilidir.

o   Katılıyorum

o   Kısmen

o   Katılmıyorum

Okuyup ezberleme ile öğrendiğim kelimeler uzun zaman aklımda kalıyor.

o   Katılıyorum

o   Kısmen

o   Katılmıyorum

Kelime öğreniminde hangisini tercih edersiniz?

o   Oyunlarla, öğrendiğim kelimeleri kullanarak

o   Okuyup ezberleme gibi klasik yollarla

Sizce ingilizce kelime öğreniminde oyunların olumlu etkisi var mıdır?

	1	2	3	4	5	
HİÇ YOKTUR	O	O	O	O	O	KESİNLİKLE VARDIR

Appendix 2: Vocabulary Quiz

Vocabulary Quiz (Vegetables and Fruits)

Name: Class:

Surname: Number:

Kate And Her Mother Are Going To Go To The Market. Help Them And Tick What They Want To Buy.   Shopping List: Strawberry-Lettuce-Watermelon-Pumpkin-Leek-Fig-Tangerine-Grapefruit-Blackberry-Grape

Appendix 3: Bingo

COCONUT	MUSHROOM	WATERMELON
STRAWBERRY	PUMPKIN	TANGERINE
LETTUCE	ONION	BLACKBERRY

Markers: