
Investigating the Impact of Using Games in Teaching Children English

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Abstract

The ever increasing numbers of EFL learners adds greater urgency to the need to prioritize the most effective means by which language proficiency can be enhanced; developing language skills through games being one such method. This study examines the overall effects of using games on the improvement of young children's English proficiency in relation to the following criteria: motivation; vocabulary acquisition; and anxiety due to peer pressure. The overarching aim of the research is to investigate the relationship between the usage of games and students' English proficiency. In this study, the subjects numbered 50 grade-six EFL students from one elementary school. By applying quantitative and qualitative research methods, the major findings demonstrate that students evidenced significant improvements in their learning motivation and vocabulary acquisition, and that their anxiety levels due to peer pressure were reduced when learning included games. Other findings reveal that there is a significant relationship/difference in the utilization of games and students' English performance, most notably with regards to proficiency levels. The various implications for pedagogical application of gaming components in regards to enhancing young learners' English performance and attitudes are also presented.

Keywords: Motivation; vocabulary acquisition; anxiety; games; English proficiency

Introduction

Globalization and the expansion of economic markets have encouraged a related increase in the numbers of EFL learners worldwide. English continues to be the lingua franca in the vast majority of EFL situations, despite the growth in Asian economies. This expansion is

exacerbated in Taiwan following the introduction of laws and statutes passed in 2001, which require that children learn English from the third grade of elementary school (Taiwan Elementary and Secondary School Community, 2008). The situation in Taiwan sets demands that are both politically and pedagogically grounded, the simple goal being that EFL teachers ought to enhance young learners' English proficiency. This situation has put to the foreground, arguments concerned with the means by which such goals might be achieved. Previous short-fall in the development of English language proficiency in Taiwan has also prioritized discussion of how to motivate students. The connections that exist, between learning motivation and student language proficiency, are well documented (Krashen, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 183). Teaching methods and learning strategies have been developed worldwide with the express purpose of improving students' English ability (Freeman, 2000). Using games is one such method and it is a popular contemporary trend in Taiwan in public elementary schools and cram schools. Numerous scholars (Chan & Lin, 2000; Jiang, 2008; Kuo, 2008; Robinson, 1960; Zheng, 2008) maintain that students' motivation and confidence can be enhanced in the process of playing games when they achieve learning goals in a relaxing environment. In addition, it is easier to maintain the attention of students by playing games because having fun satisfies an inborn predisposition toward attentiveness in human subjects (Atake, 2003; Chen, 2007; Deesri, 2002). Additionally, it is a useful tool in improve children's vocabulary acquisition in as natural a way as would be normally achieved through play (Angelova & Lekova, 1995; Atake, 2003; Deng, 2006). Kuo (2008) further mentions that "games and game-like activities have always been a popular tool in an English class in order to interest and 'wake up' uninterested students" (p. 2). However, some scholars (Chuang, 2007; Wu, 2002; Zeng, 2005) disagree about the utility of game-based learning because of the attendant anxiety created during many game playing situations. Since the issue of whether playing games is an effective means to promote children's pedagogical and psychological potential in English learning has been under discussion for a long time, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of using games in teaching children English.

Definition of Terms

According to The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1995), games are defined as "an organized activity that usually has the following properties: a particular task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players, and communication between players by spoken or written language" (p. 89). Language games are not aimed to kill time or break the ice between teachers and students. Hadfield (1984) said games are "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun" (p. 23). Similarly, Bernard and Olivia (as cited from Deng, 2006, p. 3) demonstrated that "games are a different kind of activity. They are highly structured and include specific rules to be followed." Moreover, Flexner and Hauck (as cited from Deng, 2006, p. 3) stated that "a game is a competitive activity involving skills, chance, or endurance on the part of two or more persons who play according to a set of rules, usually for their own amusement or for spectators."

There are many types of games that can be employed in a contemporary EFL learning environment, like computer games or online games, but the focus of this paper is games played in the classroom, and our definition maintains that such games require the involvement of rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. A major purpose for using games in class is to help students learn English in a lowered anxiety environment.

Types of Language Games

It is difficult to classify games into categories because such categories often overlap. Hadfield (1984) explained two ways of classifying language games: First, the author divides language games into two types: linguistic games and communicative games. Linguistic games

focus on accuracy; on the other hand, communicative games focus on the exchange of information. Jacobs (n.d.) further classified games into more detailed forms which are composed of both the elements defining linguistic and communicative games.

1. *Sorting, ordering or arranging games.* For example, students have a set of cards with months, and they have to arrange those cards in order.
2. *Information gap games.* In such games, one or more people have information that other people do not, and they have to exchange their information to complete a task.
3. *Guessing games.* These are a variation on information gap games. For instance, one student who has a flash card can not show it to others but must instead mime it to others, and then other students have to guess the word from his or her performance.
4. *Searching games.* These games are another version of two-way information games, with everyone seeking and giving information. For example, everyone is given a clue to find out who the criminal is. They have to ask and then reply to their partners to solve the problem.
5. *Matching games.* As the name implies, participants need to find a match for a word, picture, or card.
6. *Labeling games.* These are a form of matching game. The only difference is that the participants match labels and pictures.
7. *Exchanging games.* Many card games fall into this category. In these games, students barter cards, objectives, or ideas.
8. *Board games.* “Scrabble” is one of the most popular games in this category.
9. *Role playing games.* Such games involve students in playing roles that they might not play in real life. They might also be employed to get students to practice set dialogues.

In this study we contend primarily, with three varieties of gaming types: arranging games, guessing games, and matching games. They are adopted to facilitate students’ motivation, confidence, and vocabulary acquisition. More recent studies related to the positive and negative effects of playing games and the subsequent performance of students in measures of English proficiency are discussed in the following section.

Literature Review

Positive Effects

Numerous scholars (Chan & Lin, 2000; Jiang, 2008; Kuo, 2008; Robinson, 1960; Zheng, 2008) have pointed out that games are useful for children involved in the learning of English since games can strengthen students’ motivation and self-confidence. According to Skinner’s theory, playing can be presented as a kind of prize after learning which allows teachers to motivate learners to step forward (Pound, 2005). If students are aware that they are going to play games after they learn either grammar structure or vocabulary, they will look forward to participating in those activities and apply things that they have recently learned with greater motivation. The significance of playing is also supported by Piaget due to its contribution to the development of problem solving, creativity, and communication which happens naturally in the process of playing games (Slavin, 2006). Additionally, the affective filter hypothesis of the natural approach which was proposed by Krashen argues that “learners with high motivation generally do better, and learners with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to be more successful” (as cited from Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 183). This concept is related to using games in teaching English to raise children’s motivation and confidence which can then promote higher levels of English learning. In Jiang’s study (2008), composed of a structured questionnaire, classroom observations and the dynamics teacher-student relationships, 360 respondents’ attitudes toward using games in learning English at a primary school were

investigated. Sixty-eight percent of students preferred using games as teaching aids. Moreover, all students expressed a negative attitude when games were not employed in class. In other words, students prefer to be immersed in a game-teaching environment which is highly effective in raising their motivation and interest in English language learning. The same conclusion was also advocated by Kuo's (2008) research. Kuo compared two teaching approaches, – regular teaching and game teaching, – by dividing students into the experimental group (giving game teaching) and the control group (giving regular teaching). Results showed that the experimental group was superior to the control group both in students' English oral ability and in confidence. Therefore, games not only bring fun to the class, they also motivate students and build their confidence (Chan & Lin, 2000; Robinson, 1960; Zheng, 2008).

Chen (2007) is of the same opinion, showing that games are workable because they can easily attract the attention of students, thus influencing student motivation and enhancing English ability. A very similar position is supported by Atake (2003) who declared that "...through this research, I realized that using games is useful for teachers to . . . lower stress, to naturally keep their [students'] attention . . ." (p. 26). Deesri (2002) also advocated that games offer a chance for real communication, while also decreasing the stress-levels experienced by students. Using games, according to the same study, also maintains high levels of attentiveness as any basic understanding of human nature might suggest probable. To continue with the idea of human nature leads us to the biological approach, where, it is argued, playing is vital to the development of the flexible and adaptable human brain because children's imagination and creativity are enhanced by playing (Pound, 2005). Based on the studies mentioned above, the importance of using games in facilitating children's motivation and confidence appears to be well supported.

In addition to facilitating children's motivation and confidence, learners can acquire vocabulary more quickly and easily by doing actions during game playing (Angelova & Lekova, 1995; Atake, 2003; Deng, 2006). According to Dewey's "learning by doing", children learn best by doing and by acting in the world (Pound, 2005). When children touch something, they get to realize what the object is and how it feels; when they do some action, they get to know its meaning. By using a game which offers children lots of opportunities to do, to act, and to move, children can acquire a greater quantity of meaningful vocabulary. Similarly, Total Physical Response (T.P.R.), a teaching approach aimed at improving student vocabulary acquisition, relies heavily upon the above outlined scenario. Meaning is conveyed through actions which students are involved with in the playing of games. In T.P.R., role playing, which is viewed as a type of game that is centered on everyday situations, such as 'at the restaurant', 'shopping in the supermarket', or 'visiting the post office'. During enactments, classmates interact in their role playing, thus enabling students to acquire additional vocabulary, often unconsciously (Freeman, 2000). Furthermore, games which are designed for learners who have bodily intelligence, or so called kinesthetic intelligence as outlined in Gardner's 'Multiple Intelligences', can help students memorize and utilize new vocabulary more efficiently (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Deng (2006) observed 45 students and carried out a 4-month experiment by teaching subjects in a traditional way during the first two months and then teaching students via games in the last two months. Then the teacher picked 10 words and taught five of them in a regular way and the other half intrinsic to a game. The results of the experiment between game teaching and non-game teaching indicate that it is beneficial to use games to promote language proficiency and vocabulary acquisition. Also, Atake (2003) made the following statement in her research, arguing that "students are challenged to think and use certain target vocabulary expressions . . . but in games it becomes easier for students to memorize because students are impressed by competing or interacting with classmates" (p. 13). The same research results are supported by Angelova and Lekova (1995), who concluded

that games and movements during play help children remember foreign language vocabulary and encourage the students to use them spontaneously. Based on the studies mentioned above, the importance of using games in facilitating children acquiring a greater vocabulary is evident.

Negative Effects

In contrast, according to previous studies (Chuang, 2007; Wu, 2002; Zeng, 2005), using games in English learning is not productive due to the generation of anxiety which makes children nervous and even depressed, attitudes that can derive from losing games or being blamed by peers for their performance. For example, Wu (2002) conducted research investigating children's foreign language anxiety by employing a questionnaire, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), interviews, and classroom observations with 601 participants from nine elementary schools in Taipei County. The result shows that competitiveness in games is one of the major sources of language anxiety. Through these experiments, the author states that when it comes to games, students not only have to compare, but are also obliged to score for their team, resulting in higher levels of anxiety. They are afraid of being scolded by their peers, consequently, answering correctly becomes party to a stressful environment. Chuang's (2007) study also states that children's anxiety increases because they are afraid of being blamed by their team members. To test the influence of student anxiety by using games in English learning, Chuang conducted a questionnaire survey with 675 participants from the fifth and sixth grades in an elementary school. The researcher used a "Foreign Language Anxiety Scale" in her study and the findings show that 60.6% of the participants expressed a fear of socially negative evaluation as the major reason behind increases in anxiety when games were lost. The same argument, that using games accelerates children's anxiety when teachers adapt games in the teaching of English, is also made by Zeng (2005). In the study, 803 pupils were asked to do a questionnaire survey as part of a multiple-staged cluster sample. One of the results states that- children's motivation decreases and their anxiety increases because their classmates keep pushing them during games. From such research, and other studies conducted by Wu (2002), Chuang (2007), and Zeng (2005), it can be shown that playing games can increase children's anxiety largely as a result of peer pressure.

To sum up, according to previous studies, using games to teach young learners can enhance student motivation, confidence, and vocabulary acquisition, because of the advantages of challenging content it is easier to capture their attention than with traditional teaching. However, it may alternately increase student anxiety due to peer pressure. To examine the effects of applying games for the enhancement of different proficiency-level students, in terms of motivation and vocabulary acquisition, the following questions were specifically addressed in the study:

1. What is the overall effect of using games on the improvement of English proficiency in terms of motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety from peer pressure?
2. What is the relationship between students' English performance and the use of games in learning English?
3. Is there a significant difference among students with different proficiency levels in their use of games?
4. What are students' perceptions toward the influence of using games on their own English proficiency?

In order to evaluate the impact of game teaching on EFL young learners' English learning, a questionnaire survey and a semi-structured interview technique were employed in this study.

Methodology

The pragmatic parallel mixed-method of research was applied in this study. Questionnaire, interviews, and document collection were utilized to explore the effects of using games in teaching elementary school EFL learners. For the questionnaires, correlational designs were used to investigate the relationship between the variables of - using games and - children's English proficiency. The variables of English learning experiences in using games included student motivation, student vocabulary acquirement, both in school and cram school, and student anxiety from peer pressure. Furthermore, interviews were practiced to explore student perceptions toward the use of games while learning English. In the following sections, the method in terms of instruments, data collection and analysis procedures are further introduced.

Subjects

The subjects in this study consisted of 50 grade-six EFL elementary students (23 boys and 27 girls) from a primary school. According to the result from a demographic questionnaire, it showed that the participants all had experiences concerned with learning English while playing games. The results also showed that all participants had played 'arranging games', 'guessing games', and 'matching games', before, either from their school or from their cram school. In order to evaluate student English proficiency, the final score of the whole semester for each subject was obtained from the school teachers. The results which ranged from 65 to 99.54 points, with the mean score of 86.82, were applied to categorize those subjects into three groups or levels -- low, intermediate, and high levels. The detailed information regarding the distribution of subjects is shown in Table 1. Additionally, a *t*-test was computed to further examine the appropriateness of categorizing the high and low groups, finding that there was a significant difference between the high and low groups. Thus, the number of subjects in each group is appropriate. Furthermore, a pilot test for the section of teaching vocabulary was done before conducting this research in order to confirm that none of the subjects had learned the chosen words previously.

Table 1

Classification of Three Groups

Level	N	Rate	Score	Mean	SD
H	14	27%	93.21 – 99.54	96.04	1.83
I	22	46%	82 – 93.17	87.61	3.08
L	14	27%	65 – 81.67	76.36	5.22

Note: N=50, H=High, I=Intermediate, L=Low

Instruments

Two instruments were applied to the present study. First of all, a questionnaire, following the design, and adopted from the studies of Kuo (2008), Wu (2002), Zeng (2005), and Zheng (2008). Twenty multiple-choice questionnaire items were composed regarding the subjects' self-reports of using games to influence their motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety due to peer competition. Fourteen questions were composed including five items in the motivation section, five items in the vocabulary acquisition section, and four items in the anxiety section. The questionnaire consisted of a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was provided in a Chinese version because most of the participants are English learning beginners. In order to testify to the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, each item of the questionnaire was examined by using the software, SPSS 17.0, showing that there was a significant difference in each question item, so all the items were retained. Additionally, the results of reliability showed that Cronbach's alpha

(α) of motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety from peer pressure were .83, .81, and .61 respectively. The second instrument, a semi-structured interview, was employed to explore participants' past experiences, present experiences, and their opinions toward the effect of using games in learning English.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In this study, 50 six-grade EFL elementary students from a primary school were selected to do the questionnaire by using multistage sampling. The cluster sampling was used first to randomly select classrooms in the primary school. Then random sampling was applied to select a sample with 50 students from two classrooms. In terms of getting access to the participants, a consent form stating the purpose of the study, the rights of the respondents, and the interview process was presented in order to obtain permission from the participants.

At the beginning of this study, 50 participants were asked to do a structured questionnaire for the purpose of gathering their personal opinions. Before delivering the questionnaire to the participants, a pilot test was conducted by five participants from those 50 chosen students in order to modify the items two weeks before the main study. In the process of quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to compute the mean scores and standard deviations. Because items 10 and 12 were composed as reversed questions, they were transformed reversely while calculating.

Bivariate correlation (zero-order) analysis was used to conduct correlation coefficient (γ) for investigating the relationship between each variable and students' English proficiency. The magnitude and direction of the correlations which range from -1.00 to +1.00 represent a high or low positive relationship. In addition, students' final scores obtained from teachers were analyzed to investigate the relationship between learning English with games and in relation to student achievements.

In order to further scrutinize the differences resulting from student English proficiency levels on the effect of learning with games, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), in which the independent variable is the students' English proficiency level and the dependent variable is their self-reports of motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety from peer pressure, was employed to investigate whether students with different English proficiency levels showed significant differences in relation to the effect of learning with games.

Finally, purposeful random sampling was applied for conducting the semi-structured interview. In this study, 15 out of 50 students were randomly chosen for further, in-depth exploration of data. Questions were composed to explore participants' past experiences, present experiences, and their opinions toward the effect of using games in the learning of English. Besides this, additional follow-up questions were asked in order to build up a more complete picture. Regarding qualitative collection, tape recording was adopted during the process of interviewing, and full transcription was used for further content analysis to form a grounded theory.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of using games in learning English. Based on the participants' perceptions, four major findings are presented in what follows.

Research question 1: What is the overall effect of using games on the improvement of English proficiency in terms of motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety from peer pressure?

The questionnaire was designed in three parts in order to evaluate student perspectives as to whether the use of games improved their English ability or not in terms of motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety from peer pressure, while learning English. The results show that using games is effective for children learning English ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.15$),

especially when their motivation is enhanced ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.12$), their vocabulary acquisition is improved ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.20$), and their anxiety due to peer pressure is decreased ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.43$).

Research question 2: What is the relationship between students' English performance and the use of games in learning English?

A correlation analysis was utilized to investigate the relationship between student English proficiency and the effects of playing games upon motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety caused by peers while learning English. The results presented in Table 2 demonstrate quite revealingly that there are significant and positive relationships between students' English proficiency and their self-reports in terms of enhanced motivation ($\gamma = .67$, $p = .000$) as well as vocabulary acquisition ($\gamma = .46$, $p = .001$), even though the values of magnitude are moderate. On the contrary, there is a significantly negative relationship among student English ability and their perspectives of the effect of using games in terms of increasing anxiety caused by peers ($\gamma = -.62$, $p = .000$).

Table 2

Correlation Analysis on Students' English Proficiency and Using Games in Learning English

	Pearson Correlation (γ)	Adjusted R Square (γ^2)	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Motivation	.67	44%	38.52	.000*
Vocabulary Acquisition	.46	20%	12.93	.001*
Anxiety from Peer Pressure	-.62	37%	29.66	.000*

Note: * $p < .05$

A Scatter Plot was further implemented to inspect the distribution among student English ability and their perceptions of the effect of using games. As shown in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*, there are positive linear relationships between student performance and the enhancement of student motivation as well as vocabulary acquisition. The results indicate that students with higher scores have stronger motivation and better vocabulary acquisition when learning with games. However, with regard to the factor of anxiety due to peer pressure, *Figure 3*, there appears to be a significant negative relationship among student ability and their anxiety from peers. The findings manifestly show that students with poorer grades have higher anxiety caused by classmates during the process of playing games in learning English.

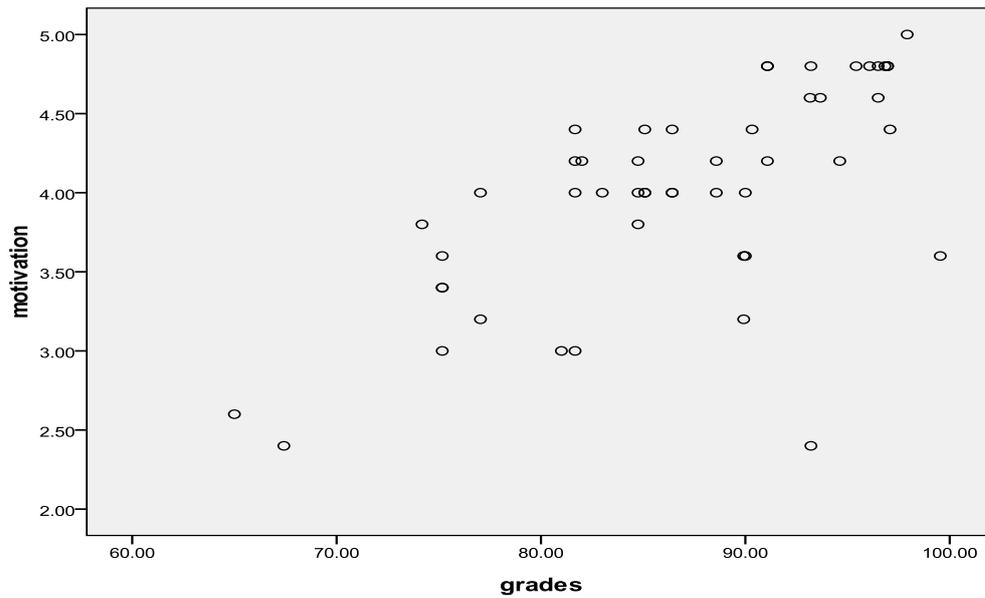


Figure 1. Scatter Plot of the Relationship among Students' English Proficiency and Their Motivation

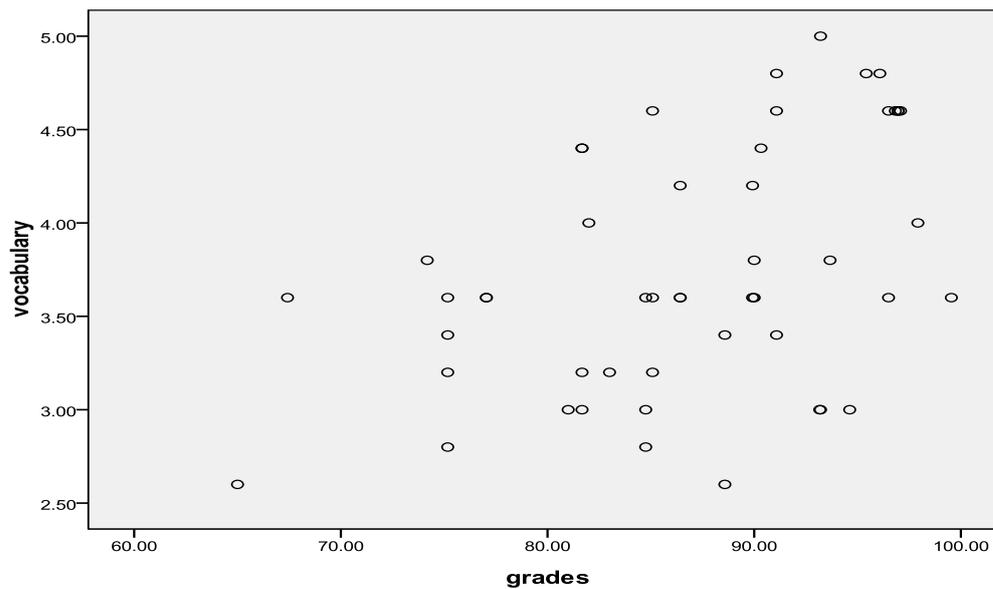


Figure 2. Scatter Plot of the Relationship among Students' English Proficiency and Vocabulary Acquisition

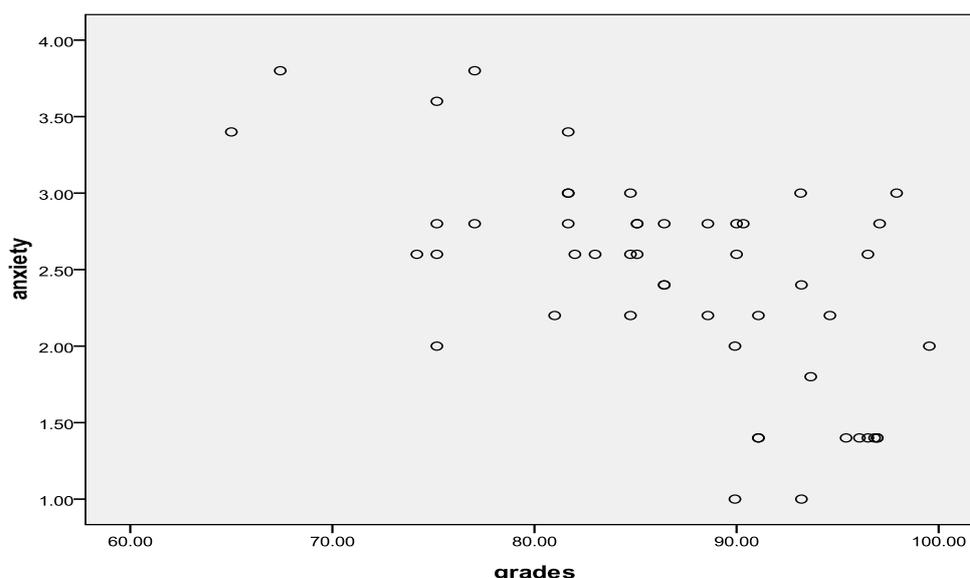


Figure 3. Scatter Plot of the Relationship among Students' English Proficiency and Anxiety from Peer Pressure

Research question 3: Is there a significant difference among students with different proficiency levels on the usage of games?

To further explore the effects of using games with students displaying different proficiency levels, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference among high, intermediate, and low levels, achieving students' self-reports toward the effect of learning with games. This was done in relation to the criteria of motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety from peer pressure. Results in Table 3 reveal that there were significant differences at the .05 level between the three factors of the effects and different proficiency levels [$F(2, 47) = 7.928, p = .001$], [$F(2, 47) = 8.875, p = .001$], and [$F(2, 47) = 11.653, p = .000$].

Table 3

One-way ANOVA Analysis between Proficiency Levels and Game Learning

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Motivation					
Between groups	7.09	2	3.55	7.93	.001*
Within groups	21.02	47	.45		
Total	28.12	49			
Vocabulary Acquisition					
Between groups	5.30	2	2.65	8.88	.001*
Within groups	14.02	47	.30		
Total	19.32	49			
Anxiety from peer pressure					
Between groups	8.80	2	4.40	11.65	.000*
Within groups	17.75	47	.38		
Total	26.55	49			

Note: * $p < .05$

Scheffé post hoc comparison procedure was further implemented to examine multiple comparisons among the means of self-reports among three proficiency levels. As indicated in

Table 4, high-level students scored significantly higher than low-level students in the factor of motivation. As for the factor of vocabulary acquisition, the results show that high-level students scored significantly higher than students in the intermediate-level group; however, in this factor, low-level students scored a little higher than intermediate-level students, denoting that students with poorer English proficiency thought games to be more useful to them as a means by which to acquire vocabulary. What is more, in the factor of anxiety from peer pressure, high-achieving students' mean scores were significantly lower than low-achieving students, indicating that students with higher English proficiency felt less anxious from peers than students from the lower proficiency level.

Table 4

Scheffé Post Hoc Comparison between Students' Proficiency Levels and Game Learning

	Levels		Mean Differences	Sig.
Motivation	H	I	.76	.007*
		L	.93	.003*
	I	H	-.76	.007*
		L	.17	.756
	L	H	-.93	.003*
		I	-.17	.756
Vocabulary Acquisition	H	I	.73	.001*
		L	.71	.005*
	I	H	-.73	.001*
		L	-.02	.996
	L	H	-.71	.005*
		I	.02	.996
Anxiety from Peer Pressure	H	I	-.81	.002*
		L	-1.06	.000*
	I	H	.81	.002*
		L	-.25	.507
	L	H	1.06	.000*
		I	.25	.507

Note: * $p < .05$, H=High –EPL, I=Intermediate-EPL, L=Low-EPL

Research question 4: What are the students' perceptions toward the influence of the usage of games on their English proficiency?

To elicit the subjects' perceptions regarding the impact of using games while learning language on their English performance, a semi-structured interview with 11 interview questions was used. With regard to the aspects of the enhancement of students' motivation and confidence by using games in learning English, most of the learners agreed that playing games can facilitate their motivation and confidence. Thirteen out of 15 participants confirmed that using games in English teaching can enhance their motivation and confidence. For example, participant #3 said that "playing games while learning English always can raise my interests. I

like to play games rather than sit there and wait for calling. I think it is the best way to learn [a new language]. I love it especially when I win the game because my classmates cheer for me and make me feel proud.” Also, participant #6 mentioned, “...sometimes I feel really bored if the teacher does not allow us to do class activities. I just feel sleepy. In addition, I think playing games is a good way to test if we understand the content or not. Once I win the game, I get great achievement from it.” Moreover, participant #5 said that “I cannot concentrate on one thing more than 10 minutes, so I am punished quite often... However, I can really focus on learning English while playing games because it is fun.” Hence, the results reveal that employing games can uplift student attentiveness and hence facilitate their learning of English.

In response to the influence of using games in promoting students’ vocabulary acquisition, participants broadly agree that playing games can help them acquire new vocabulary. Nine out of 15 participants expressed that using games in English teaching can promote their vocabulary acquisition. For example, participant #1 indicated that “during playing games, in order to win the games, each member is forced to speak and remember the English vocabularies that the teacher taught. In that way, it is easy to learn vocabulary.” Additionally, participant #7 declared, “it is easier for me to memorize vocabularies by playing different kinds of games. I can learn and use those vocabularies naturally without any pressure. If the teacher only asks me to memorize phonics and spelling, I will forget it sooner or later.” Moreover, participant #11 mentioned, “...and the matching game can help me to acquire vocabularies because at the time I match the picture and the word, the vocabulary becomes real to me. I learn faster when I touch the thing or do some action. Hence, I think playing games is useful.” Consequently, the outcomes disclose that the use of games does promote the students’ ability to acquire new vocabulary.

With regard to the perspectives of students’ anxiety from peer pressure which may be increased by using games while learning English, most participants do not agree that playing games increases their anxiety due to peer pressure. Twelve out of 15 disagreed to the statement that using games in English teaching can increase their anxiety from peer pressure; instead, they think that their anxiety is reduced while learning English by playing games. For instance, participant #8 indicated, “playing games is fun. I like to play games... and I do not think that using games to learn English increases my anxiety from peer pressure because I do not quite care about what other people think about me.” In addition, participant #10 said, “the teacher always tells us that ‘failure is the mother of success’, so we just try harder to win next time. This concept leads us to become more cooperative. My team members and I help each other, so as to decrease our anxiety from being called individually.” Furthermore, participant #14 mentioned that “I do not like to answer questions individually. I like to be in a group. If I do not know the answer, my team members will help me and somehow I learn faster from them than from the teacher.” Therefore, the findings show that using games in English teaching does not increase students’ anxiety from peer pressure.

Discussion

This study examined the overall effect on young children of using games for the enhancement of their English language learning. It focused upon motivation and vocabulary acquisition, and the reduction of anxiety from peer pressure, in relation to the pedagogical goal of improving students’ English proficiency. It also investigated the relationship between students’ English performance and employing games in the learning of English. Besides this, students’ affective reactions were analyzed in order to get more in-depth information. Moreover, the difference between students’ proficiency levels and the effects of applying games was further explored in the study.

First of all, the overall findings indicate that students hold a positive attitude toward the effect of using games for the improvement of their motivation and their vocabulary acquisition. Most students expressed that while playing games after teachers' instructions, they are really motivated to get involved in the course and understand more about the content. In addition, by the time the game is won, learners feel proud of themselves and acknowledge an increase in confidence. These improvements were also brought out by the communicative and interactive nature of the games via the process of vocabulary acquisition. Students claimed that they can learn more easily and happily by doing some actions or interacting with their classmates in a relaxing environment. Such research results support the previous studies (Angelova & Lekova, 1995; Chan & Lin, 2000; Jiang, 2008; Kuo, 2008), indicating that learning with games is a useful technique for raising the level of student motivation and vocabulary acquisition. However, an increase in anxiety due to peer pressure was not observed in this study; on the contrary, it was revealed that student anxiety from peers is somehow decreased during the use of games. Most participants think that through playing games, they do not have to bare the pressure from working on a task individually; on the other hand, they gain support from their peers. Students can also take on some responsibility for learning by tutoring each other. Such outcomes do not gain support from previous research, which found that utilizing games to teach children would raise their fear of being accused by peers (Chuang, 2007; Wu, 2002; Zeng, 2005).

Secondly, with regard to the relationships between students' English performance and the effects of playing games toward motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and anxiety caused by peers, the results show that there are significantly positive relationships among the effects of using games in terms of enhancing motivation as well as vocabulary acquisition and students' English proficiency. It indicates that students with higher motivation or faster vocabulary acquisition derived from playing games in learning English can perform better. In contrast, there is a significantly negative relationship caused by games, between students' anxiety from peers and their English ability. It signifies that students with lower anxiety from learning by playing games can perform better. It is undoubtedly the case that employing games to teach children English is efficient in enhancing their English performance due to the increase of motivation and word acquisition, and the reduction of anxiety from peer pressure.

Finally, as for the part of motivation, the results show that students with better English ability considered that playing games can motivate them more than the students with poor English ability. With regard to the factor of vocabulary acquisition, high-achieving students scored significantly higher than intermediate-achieving students; however, it is interesting to note that low-achieving students scored slightly higher than intermediate-level students. According to the interview results, students with the poorer proficiency levels stated that they could acquire words more productively by doing actions during games rather than by memorizing words in the traditional way. Furthermore, regarding the factor of anxiety due to peer pressure, the findings reveal that high-level students have significantly less anxiety caused by peers than low-level students, indicating that students with lower ability are still afraid of expressing themselves in public.

Conclusion

After presenting the findings, it is evident that using games may promote children's motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and reduce their anxiety from peer pressure. However, there are still some suggestions to be attended to drawn from the minority. Firstly, some participants who like to show themselves in public indicated that playing games cannot motivate them since it reduced opportunities to speak individually. Secondly, a few students

mentioned that they still lose their attention if the pace of the game is not fast enough or if the other team takes up too much time. Thirdly, some minority answers declared that playing games sometimes confuses them if the actions of the vocabulary are similar, like “fly”, “bird” and “airplane”. They think that teachers should create some other actions to distinguish the differences. Fourthly, some participants mentioned that they receive pressure from peers due to losing the game, so that they hope teachers can utilize more cooperative games such as searching games to reduce their anxiety. Although few students claimed that they still prefer the traditional way of learn English, they still wonder whether game usage is effective in learning a foreign language. Yet, according to the research results, students with higher motivation, faster words acquisition, and lower anxiety from peers can reach better English performance. The application of games in teaching young children English is indeed a useful way to facilitate students’ English proficiency.

According to the research results of the present study, the grounded theory is that students’ motivation and confidence can be raised in English learning, and their anxiety can be reduced by playing games because of the elements of fun and interest inherent in games. In addition, game playing is an effective means to promote student vocabulary acquisition because it helps students to learn words by acting or recognizing objects in a natural way. Therefore, it can be concluded that playing games is effective in teaching English to young learners, despite. However, the small scale and limited duration for conducting the study may cause the limitation of reaching a justifiable generalizability. To obtain a more complete picture of the effects of using games on EFL students’ learning outcomes, a control group (traditional instruction without using games) and an experimental group (game instruction) should be designed to be inclusive to such studies in future research in order to better analyze their performance differences.

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