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**Using Teacher-Made Games for Teaching English Basic  
Vocabulary to Young Students with Learning Disabilities**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of using teacher-made games to teach English basic vocabulary (Tier 1) to young students with learning disabilities, and to identify the impact of using the teacher-made games on enhancing the basic vocabulary of the learners. The study was conducted on a seven-year-old student who is in the first grade of a public primary school. In this four-week experiment, the researcher conducted 12 educational sessions where each session was 30-minutes long. The researcher used pre-test, weekly quizzes, and a post-test to establish a baseline and measure the student's progress throughout the study. The final results indicated the effectiveness of using teacher-made games to teach English vocabulary to young students with learning disabilities.

**Keywords:** Teacher-Made games; basic vocabulary; young English language learners; learning disabilities; students with special needs

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## إستخدام ألعاب من صنع المعلم لتدريس الكلمات الإنجليزية لصغار الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم

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### ملخص

هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على تأثير استخدام ألعاب من صنع المعلم لتدريس مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية الأساسية لصغار الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم، والتعرف كذلك على أثر إستخدام هذه الألعاب لتحسين مفردات اللغة الأساسية المكتسبة. وقد أجريت الدراسة على طالب يبلغ من العمر سبع سنوات يدرس في الصف الأول في مدرسة ابتدائية عامة. في هذه التجربة التي استمرت أربعة أسابيع، أجرى الباحث ١٢ جلسة تعليمية حيث كانت كل جلسة ٣٠ دقيقة. واستخدم الباحث اختبارا قبلي، استطلاع أسبوعي، واختبارا بعديا لتحديد خط الأساس وقياس مستوى تقدم الطالب طوال فترة الدراسة. وقد أظهرت النتائج النهائية فعالية استخدام الألعاب المصنوعة من المعلم لتعليم المفردات الإنجليزية الأساسية لصغار الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ألعاب من صنع المعلم، مفردات أساسية، صغار الطلاب، الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم.

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## **Introduction**

Games have been invented to entertain people and help them move and think enthusiastically. Games have been effective tools to bring people together and encourage them to interact and communicate. Using games for teaching vocabulary to young English language learners is very important for several reasons. First, vocabulary is the basic and effective verbal elements that allow students to learn and communicate with their peers, teachers, and community. Second, games make learning fun for young English language learners because they usually involve new ideas, interaction, hints, and exchange of turns. They help students pay attention as well as stay focused on the topic. Moreover, teaching through games encourages students to engage and learn without stress, and therefore, participate positively and effectively. More importantly, games can encourage students to use the language spontaneously and be creative.

## **Research Problem**

The participant in this study was a student who moved to the United State last year. The participant was not using his English vocabulary to learn and communicate with his teachers and peers. Through observation, the child was using the same words repeatedly and seemed to have learning difficulties. The seven years old student is in the first grade at a public elementary school, which has multicultural students with English as the dominant language. The school is located in Washington DC and serves students from preschool until grade 12. To assess the student, the researcher/teacher used the classroom to administer an individual pretest in order to establish a baseline and measure the student's vocabulary level.

The results of the pretest showed that the student was able to correctly identify and match seven words out of the 20 test items.

### **Importance of Research**

The importance of this study is to investigate and create strategies "Teacher-Made games" that help to teach basic vocabulary to students with learning disabilities. The importance of this study could be divided into two parts: theory importance and practical importance.

#### **First: Theory Importance**

The study concentrates on developing strategies and methods to teach English vocabulary to students with learning disabilities. Moreover, it can motivate other researchers to create different learning styles that can be used to teach different subjects.

#### **Second: Practical Importance**

This study is useful for special education teachers who teach English basic vocabulary and deal with students with learning disabilities. Finding new ways to support students with learning disabilities would ultimately enhance the skills of the students as well as streamline the education process.

### **Study Boundaries**

#### **Human Boundaries**

First-grade student who is studying at an elementary school and the student suffer from learning difficulties.

### **Spatial Boundaries**

The study was conducted at a classroom in a public elementary school, which has multicultural students with English as the dominant language. The school is located in Washington DC.

### **Time Boundary**

The second semester of 2017 academic year

### **Study Terms**

#### **1- Teacher-Made games:**

Games that are designed by teachers, where the games take into consideration the age, skills, and educational goals of the students

#### **2- Basic vocabulary:**

Michael McCarthy (1999) defined basic vocabulary as the lexicon that “would have as wide a communicative range as possible using a minimum number of words of general meaning.”

#### **3- Young English language learners:**

The young learners whose home language is not English

#### **4- Students with learning disabilities:**

The students with disabilities in specific learning areas such as mathematics, speaking, reading and writing

### **Literature Review**

Children are not born speaking a verbal language that can be understood by people. As they grow up, children go through many educational experiences where they gradually learn to interact and

communicate with the people around them. The process for learning any language starts by getting students to learn, replicate, and properly use vocabulary words (Nunan, 1999). Vocabulary is the basic and effective way that allows students to acquire knowledge and communicate with their peers, teachers, and community. Specifically, English language learners (ELL) who live in English environments must acquire English vocabulary and achieve English language proficiency in order for them to live comfortably and experience success.

In a published article, Stephanie Chung (2012) presented why vocabulary acquisition plays the most vital role in ELLs' learning of the English language. The author based her study on four measures: a four-component vocabulary program proposed by language experts, a synthesis of research findings, practical strategies, and tools that enhance ELLs' language development. The author reviewed how severity and frequency of vocabulary errors limit the process of vocabulary acquisition. She also explained how the disparity in breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge between English-only students and English language learners can negatively impact communities. Moreover, the author proposed a research-based vocabulary instruction for English language learners that would effectively enhance their vocabulary knowledge and bridge the achievement gap between them and their English-speaking peers. The proposed vocabulary instruction consists of many strategies that have been proven by research to be effective. The suggested strategies include: teaching basic words, reading to ELLs, using repeated read-aloud and word explanation, encouraging wide reading, promoting small-group discussion, teaching vocabulary in context, using sentences that construct a story,

conducting morphological analysis, and teaching word-learning strategies through games and plays.

Games play a significant role in teaching new vocabulary and knowledge. Many people enjoy playing games and learning new ideas. In her research, Osha AlNeyadi (2007) investigated the effect of using language games to reinforce vocabulary learning. The design of the study was single-subject research and was conducted on 29 sixth-grade students learning English as a second language. The measures that the researcher used were interviews, observations, and a reflective journal. Instead of using the audio-lingual approach to teach her students new vocabulary, the researcher used language games to introduce, practice, and recycle vocabulary words every two weeks and for a whole academic semester. The results of this study showed that the language games increased students' abilities to learn and recall words, cooperate with peers, and think efficiently. Moreover, the researcher received positive reactions and feedback from her students during and after the study.

In addition, Luu Tuan (2012) conducted a research to examine weather games influence vocabulary retention of young English learners in Vietnam. The purpose of the quasi-experimental research was to investigate if labeling games impacts English language learners' vocabulary recollection. The participants of the semester-long study were 63 elementary school students (represent two classes) whose ages were seven years old. The measures that the researcher used were a pretest and two posttests. The results of this research showed that the experimental group who used games exceeded the control group in recollecting vocabulary for both posttests.

Similarly, AlMasri & AlNajar (2014) conducted a study to investigate the effect of using word games on primary stage students' achievement in English vocabulary. The quasi-experimental study involved 158 first-grade male and female students studying in Jordan. The researchers used a pretest and a post-test to measure the students' level of English vocabulary. The tests consisted of thirty items on English language vocabulary. The participants of the study were divided into two groups: experimental and control. The participants of the experimental group were taught vocabulary using word games whereas the participants of the control group were taught by the traditional ways of using pictures and memorization. The study was conducted over a period of eight weeks. By statistically analyzing the data collected through the pre/posttests, the researchers concluded that word games are effective tools for teaching English vocabulary and they make learners more engaged in learning as well as using vocabulary.

Even further, Mellati, Arabani, & Pourmohammadi (2016) did a study to examine the impact of teacher-made games versus conventional games on children who learn and memorize English vocabulary. The purpose of the study was to gain information about the role of teacher-made games in the area of English vocabulary learning among Iranian students. The researchers reaffirmed the usefulness of using games to teach vocabulary as well as to develop social competences. The participants of their study were 40 English language learners from Iran whose ages ranged from eight to eleven years old. The participants were divided into two groups: experimental group and control group. The experimental group was taught new vocabulary by teacher-made games (magic box, guess box,

chance game, and angry circle) whereas the other group was taught by conventional games (memory, hot seat, erase a word and hangman). The vocabulary instruction was presented to the groups twice a week in four sessions. The measures of the study consisted of Quick Placement Test, pretest, immediate posttest and delayed posttest. The results of the study showed that using teacher-made games is more effective than conventional games in helping children discover, learn, and recall vocabulary.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the aforementioned literature review, the following research questions were developed for my study:

1. What is the effect of using teacher-made games to teach basic vocabulary (Tier 1) to young English language learners with learning disabilities?
2. What is the impact of using teacher-made games to enhance the basic vocabulary (Tier 1) of the young English language learners?

### **Research Methodology**

The design of the study is single-subject research and the measures used in this study are a pretest and a summative posttest. The study used mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative to collect more accurate data.

### **Study Society**

The study population is one student with learning disabilities who is learning English. He was diagnosed through the observations and tests at a primary school in Washington, DC. The public elementary school is affiliated to the Ministry of Education in the United States.

**Study Sample:**

An Individual sample who have learning disabilities, and needs intervention.

**Date Collection**

The data collected for this study includes the participant's Tier 1 vocabulary level, the participant's reactions throughout the experiment, and the participant's Tier 1 vocabulary level after the experiment. The data was collected through three means: pretest, posttest, and individual observation. The researcher/teacher chose to collect these data to investigate the effect of teacher-made games on young English language learners with learning disabilities who are learning Tier 1 vocabulary. Mainly, the teacher was responsible for collecting the data by administering the tests and consistently recording observations that occurred during educational sessions. The teacher's goal was to record the key details about the student's responses such as frequency/tally and consequences. Moreover, the data were collected at the school inside the student's classroom, which represented a familiar environment.

**Procedure/Description of Intervention**

Before implementing the instructions, the teacher used the classroom to administer an individual pretest in order to establish a baseline and measure the student's vocabulary level. The 25- minute pretest consisted of 20 basic Tier 1 vocabulary words that were taken from the student's course book: *Spectrum Sight Words, Grade 1*. The student's job was to match the words with their corresponding pictures. In this pretest, the student's vocabulary level depended on the number of correctly matched vocabularies. After the pretest was completed, the researcher/teacher proceeded to teach the student the vocabulary words using teacher-made games.

For this four-week experiment, the teacher conducted 12 educational sessions where each session was 30-minutes long. The instruction was delivered to the student individually in a classroom environment. The teacher executed a standard format to lead the educational sessions. The format was as follow:

- **Monday:** the student was introduced to five words. Each word is written on a colorful flash card. The teacher worked with the student, taking turns to pronounce each word and look at the accompanying picture.
- **Wednesday:** The student was given a vocabulary spinner game that included the spellings and pictures for each new word presented. After each spin, the student was instructed to repeat the word three time with correct pronunciation. The teacher gave hints and helped the student when the student was not able to identify or pronounce the words correctly. For example, if the student prompting by saying the sound of the first letter.
- **Friday:** The student was instructed to use the new word in a sentence. (verbally). The sentence needs to demonstrate that the student understands the meaning of the word, e.g. a sentence that is related to school and/or home. The teacher also used each word in a simple sentence. For the last activity, the teacher gave a 5-minutes quiz that contained each of the five words to evaluate the weekly progress of the student by asking the student to read each word, pronounce the word and use it correctly in a sentence to demonstrate correct meaning.

After the four weeks, the teacher administered a summative posttest to measure the student's vocabulary level and investigate the impact of the teacher-made games on the student's vocabulary acquisition. The four-week instruction focused on reinforcing the words that the student identified correctly in the pretest, and teaching the unknown words that the student was not able to identify. The summative posttest contained the same vocabulary words that were presented in the pretest. The goal was to determine and compare the pre/posttest performance of the student.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics and bar graph were calculated and designed to investigate how the student responded to the intervention. The researcher used the collected data to create graphs that visualize how teacher-made games impacted the student's abilities to acquire and retain vocabulary.

### **Validity and Reliability Testing**

The face and content validity of the study instrument were verified by several faculty members at the Special Education Department of the George Washington University. Before the study was conducted, the critics reviewed the instrument and suggested some modifications to ensure that the study materials were valid, adequate, and actionable. The critics' suggestions were taken into consideration and included in the study. Based on the students' course book, the researcher prepared a pretest and a posttest which contained vocabulary that the student has experienced during the educational sessions. Both tests had the same test items, but the order of the items in the posttest was different from the pretest to prevent the test practice effect. Moreover, Kuder-Richardson KR-21 reliability

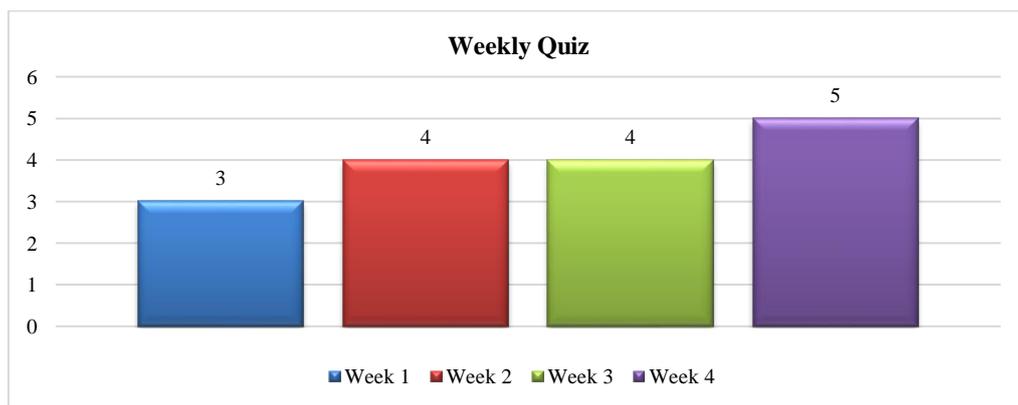
method was used to measure the reliability of the test. The results indicated an index of 0.80, which represents an acceptable reliability (Frisbie, 1988).

## Discussion

- **Baseline data:** The results of the pretest showed that the student was able to correctly identify and match seven words out of the 20 test items. The pretest was administered individually in the student's classroom, which was a familiar environment. Throughout the test period, the student was acting normally and focusing on the test.
- **Week 1:** the student was able to gain and use the words presented in the instruction. The student scored 3/5 on the weekly quiz. It's important to note that the student was not feeling well on the quiz day and this might be the factor why the student did not get better score. The instruction of the first week included two words that the student identified in the pretest, and three unidentified vocabulary words. The goal was to engage the student with the familiar words and encourage positive responses. From observation, the student was enjoying the time playing and learning with the teacher.
- **Week 2:** the student correctly gained and retained most of the second week's words. The student scored 4/5 on the weekly quiz. The week/quiz items consisted of five words: two words that the student identified in the pretest and three new vocabulary words. From observation, the student was an enthusiastic and positive learner.
- **Week 3:** the student correctly mastered four words out of the five words presented in the third week. Like the first two weeks, the instruction of the third week included two words that the student correctly identified in the pretest. Throughout the week, the student

was engaging with the instructions and the teacher as well as using the games to play and learn.

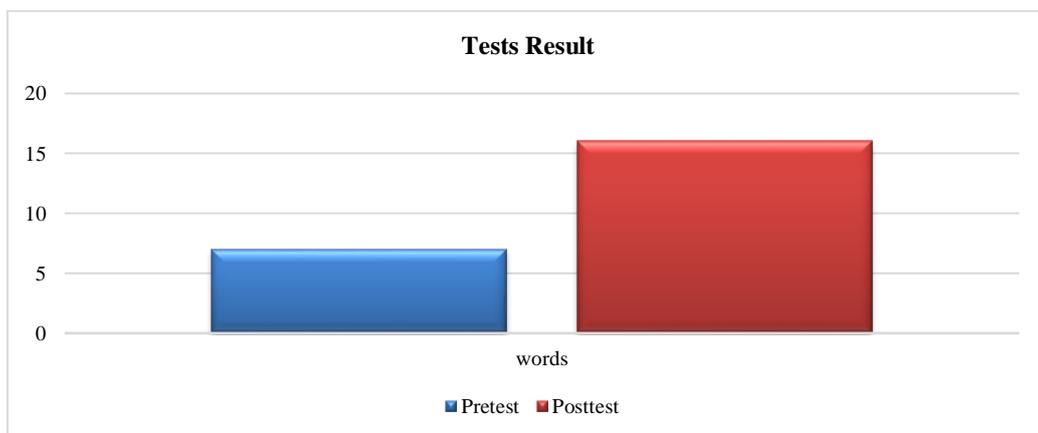
- **Week 4:** the student learned and correctly used the words of the fourth week. Notably, the student scored 5/5 on the weekly quiz, which included only one word that the student had identified correctly in the pretest. From observation, the student became more confident in using verbal words to communicate and interact. For example, the student used the word “roof” to ask the teacher to look upward. Throughout the fourth week, the student worked actively with the teacher to and seemed to enjoy learning through teacher-made games.



**Figure 1 (student's weekly progress)**

## Posttest

After the four-week intervention, the student was given a summative test to evaluate the performance of the student and what the student had learned. The results of the summative test show that the intervention had a positive impact on the student's performance to learn and retain vocabulary words. Notably, the student was able to identify most of the test items and scored 16 out of 20 possible score.



**Figure 2**

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The results of the study clearly indicate the effectiveness of using teacher-made games to teach basic vocabulary (Tier 1) to young English language learners with learning disabilities. The results also show that teacher-made games have positive impact for enhancing the basic vocabulary of the young English language learners. The useful answers of the research questions should encourage all English language teachers to design and utilize educational games to teach vocabulary and knowledge. It is not easy to engage young students and keep them focused. But as teacher-made games have proven to be effective educational tools, teachers should include games in their instructions and diversify their teaching methods. Some of the modifications that the researcher would recommend are increasing the richness of the instructions, extending the educational sessions to 40 minutes each, and introducing positive reinforcements/rewards. Spending more time with the students and providing them with tangible and intangible reinforcements would encourage them to focus, participate, and learn efficiently and effectively.

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