Using Board Games Activities in Developing Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students' Performance in Reading Skills

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Abstract
Learning a second language can be challenging and demanding, especially for teachers, as they are required to continuously innovate and improve their teaching by integrating new strategies and techniques into the classroom environment. Hence, the present study intents to examine the effect of board games activities on Iraqi Preparatory school students' reading skills. A quantitative research method is adopted, and a sample of (30) preparatory school students is randomly chosen to exemplify the two sets of the research (the control and experimental groups). The study adopts a pre-test post-test design to measure the influence of the strategy. The first hypothesis is accepted, and the researcher concluded that indeed board games activities help in developing the students' reading skills; however, other studies could concur or find different results.

Keywords: board games, activities, EFL preparatory school, performance, reading skills

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important skills and it needs to be learned besides other skills: listening, speaking, and writing. Maxom (2009: 139) states that reading has a main role in the teaching of language to enhance the skills which are acquired by the students in listening, speaking, and writing. Reading skill has an effect on the other skills in the learning process. Reading has a great significance in the process of learning for the following reasons; it helps the learner to think in the new language. Through reading, the learner can build a better vocabulary " (Yıldırım, 2010).

Reading may be the only way for the learner to use the English language as a non-native language. It makes the learner more comfortable with the written English language. Also, it helps the learner who plans to study in an English-speaking society to communicate easily with the native speakers of that society (Mikulecky and Jeffries, 1986: 1).

Intensive reading usually takes place in the classroom; it refers to reading for details. Intensive reading usually goes along with classroom activities (Dehham, 2021). Students are asked to look for selections from poems, novels, plays, and newspapers. Therefore, the purpose will limit the type of reading (Harmer, 2007: 100). Readers may read for getting information from materials hard to understand. In this way, they read slowly to comprehend. Extensive reading refers to reading which students can often do outside the classroom. Students may read material related to novels, magazine, newspaper (Harmer, 2007: 99). In this type, readers read for pleasure, with more speed in reading.

Reading aloud takes place in some classrooms. A great number of students think that reading aloud can help them understand the text (Lewis, 1999: 188). It has a significant role in teaching. It is recommended for primary level rather than the secondary level. If learners did not have enough reading aloud practicing in the early stage, they will face difficulties in the secondary stage. Reading aloud is useful to develop the ability of speaking, pronouncing or expressing ideas (Praveen and Rajan, 2013: 120-22) (Dehham, Bairamani & Shreeb, 2020).

Silent reading has an important role in teaching English. Teachers can use it to develop students' ability to read correctly. It can save time since all learners read at the same time. It makes learners very active if the subject matter is interesting (Ibid: 122-123). The students have difficulties to comprehend the meaning (Lyon, Shywitz & Shywitz, 2003). Napa (1991) states that many ways can be used to develop students' reading skill. Also, it can be used many different techniques, such as picture, crossword puzzle, song, game, text, board games and translation for teaching reading skills" (Rahoomi, et al., 2019). One of these techniques is by using Board Games.

"Board Games are a an interesting technique to pick up new vocabulary and play with the vocabulary that has already familiar". "They contain fantasy, ritual, competition, and luck that are interesting for students". On the other hand, games reduce boredom. "When board games are used, the situations of classroom become life and natural (Lee, 1994)". The present study aims at improving English Reading skills through board games for Iraqi EFL 4th preparatory school students.

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulated the research questions as follow:
1. To What extent is the effectiveness of Board Games in improving reading skills of 4th preparatory students?
2. How far is the effectiveness of using Board Games on teaching reading skills 4th preparatory students?
3. Is there "a significant difference" between the mean scores obtained by the subjects of the "experimental group" who are taught reading skills according to board games and that of the "control group" who are taught reading skills according to the prescribed method in reading skills posttest?

Theoretical Background
Reading is the process of understanding and grasping the meaning of printed or written material, in other words. It includes a conscious strategy which leads to perception (Hassan, 2015: 3). Tizon (2013: 252) points out that reading ability plays a central role in the teaching and learning success at all educational stages.

It is worth mentioned that a reading skill is a cognitive ability which a person is able to use when interacting with the written text (Kareem, et al. 2019). According to Davies (1978:123), reading skills involve identifying word meaning, drawing inferences, identifying writer’s technique, recognizing mood of passage, and finding answers to questions.

According to Lunzer et al., (1979:224), reading skills are as follows: word meaning in context, literal comprehension, drawing inferences, interpretation of metaphor, finding main ideas, forming judgments. Reading skills, as in (Grabe,1991:98), also involve: automatic recognition skills, vocabulary and structural knowledge, formal discourse structure knowledge, content/world background knowledge, synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies, metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring. "Grabe (1991:98) uses very general categories, equivalent to knowledge areas". "If reading itself is a skill, it must be possible to break this down into different levels of component skills categories". Games provide opportunities for the student to learn and make them easily to catch the material in the classroom (Hussein, et al,2019).

Nelson, Christopher and Mims (2009: 1), describes a board games as "a game for arranging letter that will be played by 2 or 4 people who set the point base on the score of word which is formed by letter on board game that it is forming square word/ cross word " (Ali, et al.,2019). According to Wikipedia(2020:1) board game is "a word game in which two to four players score points by placing tiles, each bearing a single letter, onto a game board divided into a 15×15 grid of squares".

Petersen-Perlman et al (1999: 255) propose the steps for teaching reading by board game. "The teacher tries to attract their attention by asking some question". "It is the way to stimulate students’ background of knowledge about some vocabularies from the reading passage" (Hammad, et al.,2018).

"The teacher gives example by the text". "Then, the teacher asks the student to find some unknown words". "The teacher divides them into 4 groups randomly and each group consists of 7-8 students" (Abbas, et al.,2018).
"Each group has eight letters and each group has one leader". "The teacher explains the rules of the activity and gives the example".

"The teacher commands the students to begin the game". "The students try to find new word and translate the words found". At the end, the teacher gives the evaluation".

**METHOD**

The present study adopts a quantitative research design. The two randomly selected samples are equated in terms of age (in months), sex, background knowledge, and linguistic abilities.

The research method in the present study is an experimental one. Therefore, it has two variables including an independent (wordless-book strategy) and a dependent variable (the test results). The population of the study represents the fourth preparatory school students of central Babylon educational directorate in the educational year (2019-2020) (Shahzadi et al., 2020).

The two samples were randomly selected from Al.Warkaa Preparatory School for boys. The size of the sample is (30) fourth preparatory students allocated into two groups, group (A) represents the control sample, and group (B) represents the experimental sample. Group (A) receives traditional language teaching, while group (B) is taught according to the Board Games Activities.

**Sample Equivalence**

The researcher equated the two samples concerning their social and economic status by selecting them from the same district in Karbala and also from the same school. The age of the participants was measured by months, and those who had repeated the year were excluded from the experiment. The test scores were used to compare the two samples’ linguistic background by measuring the mean scores for the first course, which turned out to be (16.3) for the control group and (16.8) for the experimental group. The achievement of the parents was also taken into consideration and equated by using a statistical formula (Chi-square).

**Table 1: Some variables of the equivalency of the two groups**

| Variable          | Group          | Mean | Standard deviation | Freedom degree | T- test Calculated | Tabular | Significance |
|-------------------|----------------|------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------|--------------|
| Age by month      | Experimental   | 65.56| 3.65               | 59             | 0.185              | 2       | insignificant |
|                   | Control        | 65.38| 3.41               |                |                    |         |              |
| 1st course        | Experimental   | 62.56| 9.87               | 59             | 0.342              | 2       | insignificant |
| English achievement| Experimental   | 62.56| 9.87               | 59             | 0.342              | 2       | insignificant |
|                   | Control        | 31 1 |                    |                |                    |         |              |

**Extraneous Variables**

Some extraneous variables may affect the course of the experiment. Therefore, the researcher made sure to equate them, too. The experiment lasted for 45 days, and none of the participants left the experiment. They all mature the same as the experiment did not last more than the intended period. Hence, the growth is unified across all members of the experiment. The students did not know that they are participating in an experiment; therefore, Hawthorne effect did not take place (Dehham:2021).

**The Material**

The material used in the experiment is English for the Iraqi textbook for the fourth preparatory school and the trial covered units (2.3) from the textbook. The researcher, throughout the experimental period, presented 20 lessons and set several behavioral objectives to be met across (20) lesson plans, which are proved by a jury of (15) language methodologists.
Instrument
The achievement test is defined as the estimation of the information of learners in certain content, skill, or fulfillment in a certain material, period frame, and course of study. It may also assist in distinguishing the level of students and what they need to improve and work on (Brown, 2003). The achievement test was structured by the following procedures:

1. The pre-test intended to measure students’ vocabulary achievement before implementing the experiment.
2. The post-test was designed to measure students’ vocabulary retention after receiving formal instruction under the wordless-book strategy.
3. The scoring is done by giving a mark for every correct answer and a zero for any incorrect answers. The highest possible score is (30) and the lowest one is zero.
4. Test validity is achieved by validating it by a jury of 15 language specialists, who instructed some corrections and amendments which were followed accordingly.
5. Pilot testing was done on two more schools, which are located near the primary school in which the researcher conducted his experiment. The test items were statistically analyzed. The item difficulty ranges between (0.70-0.32), item discrimination ranges from (0.85-0.29). The statistical results demonstrate that the test is valid.

Table 2: T-Test Results For The Study Groups Of the Test

| Group       | No. of students | Mean | Standard deviation | T-test | Significance at (0.05) |
|-------------|-----------------|------|--------------------|--------|------------------------|
| Experimental| 30              | 32.90| 4.72               | 59     | Significant in favour of the experimental group |
| Control     | 30              | 24.96| 3.53               |        |                        |

CONCLUSION

The statistical analysis of the results illustrates that the students of the experimental group are superior when it comes to vocabulary retention with a mean score of (28.5) and that of the control group to be (22.8) at (0.5) level of significance. The researcher accepts the alternative hypothesis and rejects the null one. The results above are in line with other research findings that suggest the superiority of wordless-book strategy as opposed to traditional methods of teaching.

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