



RESEARCH PAPER

An Action Research on Improving Vocabulary Skills of the Middle School Students through Scrabble

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ABSTRACT

Improvement in the Vocabulary skills is very important as it consists of a variety of words enriching a language which is essential for communication. One of the techniques which can be used to improve vocabulary is Scrabble. This research study was aimed to find out the causes which prevent the Middle School students from expanding their vocabulary and the influence of Scrabble in improving their vocabulary skills. Action Research design was adopted and Qualitative Research approach was employed for this study by the researcher. The population of this study consisted of One Hundred students of the Middle School and the sample of this study consisted of twelve students of Grade Seven. The Sampling method used in this study was Convenience Sampling. The data was collected through observations and interviews which was then analysed through thematic analysis. The findings showed that Scrabble had a positive impact on the vocabulary skills of the students as it helped them in improving their communication skills as well as in the memory retention. It also gave them a sense of motivation as they not only experienced a better word variety but also a contextual understanding of the subjects. According to the results, it was recommended that the schools and all the associated stakeholders must utilize Scrabble as it fosters critical thinking and teamwork and is a valuable medium in enhancing vocabulary skills in the educational institutions

Keywords: Improving Vocabulary skills, Middle School Students, Scrabble

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Introduction

Vocabulary, according to Grambs (2019), is a set of terms that are typically defined and arranged alphabetically in a dictionary or other specialised glossary. We may thus infer that vocabulary is a list of words found in dictionaries that are grouped according to a single meaning. As stated by Fahrizal (2019), Harmer asserts that vocabulary is more than just a collection of terms.

English vocabulary is like a treasure of words that holds great importance in the learning journey of mankind. It is also helpful in improving the communication abilities as well. The experiences and thoughts also grow with the passage of time. Having a diverse vocabulary allows a person to articulate these thoughts and feelings accurately. It helps to engage in meaningful conversations, ask questions, and participate actively in class discussions. This skill is necessary not only in schools but in every aspect of life.

Listening, speaking writing and reading are the four abilities that are required to be learned when learning the language (Sari, 2018). The important elements of learning English are vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar and among them, vocabulary plays an important role in promoting effective English language learning (Thornburry, 2017). If students already know English Vocabulary, they will be able to learn the language, more quickly (Hanson & Padua, 2011).

In connection with this, improvement of vocabulary is an important part for the Middle School level such as Grade Seven students. These students are at a crucial stage of their academic development, and understanding the importance of a rich vocabulary can greatly improve their learning experience. The researcher observed the Middle School students of Grade Seven by asking them to read passages from the textbooks. It was found out that they were not able to pronounce most of the words properly. When the researcher asked them the spellings in the written passages, it was found out that the students were finding it difficult to retain vocabulary words and express themselves. There are other reasons behind this problem as well. When the Middle School students of Grade Seven were asked about it, it was revealed that the students were finding the subjects more challenging to understand because they contain advanced texts and literature. Secondly, the students have become extremely lazy to memorize new words. As a result of this, they don't pay attention while the teacher is teaching them in class. Furthermore, the burden of textbooks and traditional methods of teaching vocabulary are also the causes of making the classroom teaching boring as they promote rote learning.

When teaching English, the teacher should concentrate on effective strategies. In addition to knowing how to use the techniques, a teacher needs to be aware of each student's unique characteristics. Every teacher wants to have a productive teaching method but along with that, the teacher as an instructor must also possess competence to exercise it

properly in class. In the process of teaching and learning, student involvement and enjoyment are just as vital as the amount of instruction or lack thereof that takes place in the classroom.

In this research, the researcher used Scrabble as a technique to improve the vocabulary skills of the Middle School students of Grade Seven. There are many advantages of using Scrabble in improving vocabulary of the students. It allows the student to make use of English words on the Scrabble board which enables them to practice the vocabulary which is stored in their brains. The use of Scrabble enables the students to think critically and exercise decision making ability to a good effect. According to Sari (2018), as students play the game, they can spell, comprehend, remember, and use the words, which helps them to learn vocabulary.

Problems for the students in memorizing the vocabulary

The problems for the students in memorizing the vocabulary is because of their lack of interest in class. This is due to their involvement in other activities such as online games and other platforms which have shifted their interest from academics to other activities. The methodology used in classroom is considered dull and monotonous by the students. Considering the above problem, the researcher conducted the study to improve the vocabulary skills of the Middle School Grade Seven students in a Private School of Karachi.

Scrabble Game Strategy

According to Spear, cited by W. M Khubaib (2022), there are certain rules on the basis of which Scrabble is played. Scrabble is a word game which is played by two, three or four players. The words can be made on the Scrabble board with the help of tiles. The words can be made by connecting the tiles with already placed tiles to make new words. In order to make words, the tiles must be placed in a straight line either horizontally or vertically because diagonal words are not accepted as per the Scrabble rules.

1. Equipment of the Scrabble Board

Scrabble equipment consists of (a) a Scrabble Board (b) a tile bag which has one hundred tiles. Ninety-eight of them have letters written on them in the centre and numbers as point values at the bottom right, while two are blank tiles. (c) Four Tile Racks (one for each player).

2. Setting up the Scrabble

Scrabble Board is placed in the centre of the of the players preferably on a table and the players play around it.

3. Premium Bonus tiles

Premium bonus tiles are indicated with different colours on the Scrabble Board. The players get additional bonus points while placing the tiles on them. The premium tiles are (a) Triple Word Score, (b) Double Word Score, (c) Triple Letter Score and (d) Double Letter Score. On all the premium tiles the players get the values based upon the tiles placed on them, as the scores are either multiplied by three or by two.

4. *Acceptable words*

All parts of speech are accepted in Scrabble. However, (a) compounds words, (b) words having an apostrophe, (c) words with hyphen in between them, (d) proper nouns of other languages and even some of the English Language proper nouns, (e) short forms, (f) suffixes and prefixes are not acceptable according to the Scrabble rules.

5. *Starting Scrabble* In order to start the game, the players take out one tile each from the tile bag without looking inside the tile bag as it is not considered ethical. The player whose tile is close to A, wins the toss and can make the word from the centre at the point of star. The winner of the toss is also awarded double points while making this move. All players must have seven tiles each in their tile racks to make a word.

6. *The Word Challenge*

This is the right of every player to challenge words made by their partners. In case of an incorrect word, the player placing the incorrect word removes the tiles from the Scrabble board and the turn is passed to the other player. No points are rewarded to the player.

7. *Dictionaries and other resources to check the words* According to (Pvt.) (Ltd.) et al., (2023), for Scrabble word checking, Online software and dictionaries are used such as Zyzzyva, CSW' 21 (Collins Scrabble Word

Dictionary) and Wali Timer.

8. *Fifty points Bonus Bingo*
A player can avail a fifty points bonus when all seven tiles of the rack are placed on the Scrabble Board altogether. This bonus is called a bingo.

9. *Exchanging tiles or overdrawing them*

If a player intentionally or unintentionally takes more tiles from the tiles bag, then in this case, the playing partner can exchange maximum of three tiles of the opponent in the tile bag. Exchanging tiles also arises when the player cannot make a word from the seven tiles. In this condition, the player's turn is exchanged and no points are awarded.

10. *Ending the game*

The game will end if all the hundred tiles of the tile bag are placed on the Scrabble Board. The Scrabble game also ends when the players are not able to make any further word from the given tiles.

11. *Some Clarification of the Rules for better execution*

a. The player making use of the two blank tiles must communicate the partner which letter the tile will be used for. For Example in making a word TRAIN, the player makes T R ? I N, where ? (question mark) stands for a blank tile, so it is the duty of the player to inform the partner that the blank tile is an A.

b. A word made by a player on the Scrabble Board can be made more than once in the same game.

c. All plural forms of words are permitted in Scrabble. Players can add 'ES' or simply 'S' to make new plural words.

New words can also be made by joining additional tiles on the Scrabble

Board. For example, 'B' can be added to LINK to make BLINK. ED can be added to BLINK at the end to make BLINKED etc.

Improving vocabulary through Scrabble

For the Middle School students of Grade Seven, using Scrabble as a technique may add a great deal of enjoyment and excitement to the process of acquiring vocabulary. Learning vocabulary with the help of Scrabble can enable the students in words retention, pronunciation and improvement in spellings as well.

Improve retention of words in the memory

Firstly, Scrabble can improve vocabulary learning results of the students. (Juliantina, 2020; Khaira, 2021; Yulianti & Bharati, 2017). It enables them to think out of the box. Playing Scrabble encourages the students to remember and use a wide variety of words, which helps them to have a better understanding of language.

Promoting team building in classrooms

Secondly, Scrabble helps to promote and boost team building in the classrooms, much for the delight of the students and it also gives opportunities to teachers who can observe the students' relational talents and cooperation abilities among each other (Daulay et al., 2021).

Significance of the study

The current research shows a significant relationship between effective use of Scrabble and its impact on the improvement of vocabulary of the Grade Seventh of the Middle School students. The researcher is hopeful that the result of this study can provide benefits which are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it has the potential to offer significant contributions towards the advancement of English language education and learning initiatives. Practically, it can provide a useful alternative selection of educational resources that English teachers can use to improve students' vocabulary.

Scope of the study

The research study focused on the influence of Scrabble in improving vocabulary skills of the Middle School students. The research was conducted in a Private school of Karachi and the participants of this research were the students of Grade Seven of the Middle School. The researcher here was also the teacher and observer of the students who used Scrabble as a technique to share the material with the students easily. It potentially grabbed the attention and interest of the student during the instructional activity. As a result, the students joyfully followed the teaching and learning activity and did not become bored.

Objectives of the Study

General objective of the study

The general objective of the study will be to improve Vocabulary Skills of the Middle School students through Scrabble.

Specific objectives of the study

After doing this research, researcher will be able:

1. To find out the influence of Scrabble in improving vocabulary skills of Grade Seven students of the Middle School.
2. To investigate the challenges faced by Grade Seven students of the Middle School in trying to improve their vocabulary skills.
3. To find out the difficulties observed while putting the Scrabble gameplay into practice.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes that prevent Middle School students from expanding their vocabulary?
2. What are the difficulties observed while putting the Scrabble gameplay into practice?
3. How can Middle School students improve while retaining their vocabulary with frequent Scrabble integration?

Research Design

This research was conducted to improve the vocabulary skills of the Middle School students of Grade Seven through Scrabble. Action Research design was adopted and Qualitative Research approach was employed for this study by the researcher.

Research Instrument: The tools used for this research were (a) Observations and (b) Interviews. With the help of these research tools, the researcher wanted to find out the difficulties faced by the students while putting the Scrabble gameplay into practice and the causes that prevent Middle School Grade Seven students from expanding their vocabulary.

Population: The population of this Action Research consisted of One Hundred students of the Middle School (Grade Seven) namely Grade Seven Sections A, B, C, D and E.

Sample: The sample of this study consisted of twelve students of Grade Seven 'A'. The Sampling method used in this study was Convenience Sampling Method.

Research Strategy: The research method was designed and conducted by the author who was also the teacher for the purpose of testifying the Research Study that the use of Scrabble is effective on the Middle School students of Grade Seven.

The teacher observed the vocabulary skills of the students by conducting different activities with Scrabble over a period of three weeks and in two phases namely Phase One and Phase Two. It was conducted two hours a day and five days a week from Monday till Friday in the School's auditorium.

a) In Phase One: The following strategies were executed.

- (i) The researcher first guided the students how to play Scrabble.
- (ii) There was a PowerPoint Presentation to guide them the rules of the game.
- (iii) As demonstration the students were allowed to observe Scrabble games which were played by some expert players of Scrabble of the same School where the research study was conducted.
- (iv) Phase One continued for two days, where the students were made to

sit in groups of four since they were relatively new in using Scrabble. They were then provided Scrabble sets (Boards, racks, tiles in and words recording sheets). They were given time to make words of their own. Along with the demonstration, the expert Scrabble players also assisted the new players while they were playing.

(v) The students were allowed to use Online Scrabble Dictionary (Collins Scrabble Word Dictionary, 2021), Zyzyvva Dictionary which was installed in the laptops of the school. Moreover, a mobile application Wali Timer was also installed for Word Checking.

(vi) The students were required to learn at least five words a day (four letter words).

b) In Phase Two, to develop the interest of the students, matches were conducted between the students by the researcher.

(i) In this Phase, the students were paired with each other. A total of six pairs were made through TSH Software, which is internationally used to pair the students and conduct the tournaments.

(ii) The students were also given word recording sheets to write the words which they made during the matches. The maximum time allowed for a Scrabble match was fifty minutes (twenty-five minutes per player).

(iii) At the end of this Phase, the researcher took a test of the vocabulary of the students to check the spelling and word retention of the students.

c) On the basis of the research questions of the study an interview was conducted by the researcher from the students to know the causes that prevent Middle School students from expanding their vocabulary and the difficulties observed while using Scrabble as a technique to improve the vocabulary skills of the students.

Data Analysis: The researcher collected the data from (a) Observations and (b) Interviews, in order to find out the impact of using Scrabble in improving vocabulary skills of Middle School students of Grade Seven.

(a) Observations

In Phase One, the data was collected from the word recording sheets which was given to each student (a total of twelve-word document sheets). There was a space for making twenty words on the word recording sheet. The students were encouraged to think of any new word which they had not used before and for this purpose an additional space of five new words was given on the word recording sheet. The students were required to make the words on the Scrabble board. To check if a word was valid, they were allowed to use (i) Wali Timer (ii) Zyzyvva Software and (iii) Collins Scrabble Word (CSW) Dictionary. The researcher observed the words made by the students and distributed word recording sheets each day. In Phase Two, the students were made to sit in pairs i.e. two students played on one board. The students were given new word recording sheets and matches were conducted among them to observe whether any change was found in the word making of the twelve students or not. Each match was of fifty minutes (twenty-five minutes per player). The researcher collected the data of the students at the end of every match. The students were

guided by the researcher to learn five new words every day and write those words in the word documentation sheet after placing them on the Scrabble Board. At the end of every week, a vocabulary test was conducted on the website of Association of British Scrabble players' website (Home Page, n.d., 2023) and the students' performance of the vocabulary was observed with the number of levels passed on the website as it is a standardized source for word making quality.

(b) *Interviews*

The data from the interview was analysed by the researcher who then summarized the data. In order to provide more comprehensible data, the researcher prepared the transcription of the interviews.

Thematic Analysis: The researcher was able to get seven themes, with categories of each theme and coded categories as part of the Thematic Analysis.

Table 1

Thematic Analysis

S. No	Themes	Category	Coded with Frequency
1	Interest in Learning	Observed	Yes (7)
2	Vocabulary Vocabulary Challenges	Learning Reading Writing Reasonin g	No (5) i) Problems in remembering words (7), ii) Pronunciation (8), iii) Spelling mistakes (5), iv) Poor performance in writing (3) v) Lack of motivation
3	Vocabulary Changes	Observed	Yes (12)
4	Types of Vocabulary changes		No (0) i) Improved vocabulary (6) ii) Improved Spelling (7) iii) Greater word variety (5) iv) Better Communication (4) v) Better contextual understanding (2) v) Creative writing (8)

Boosting Vocabulary via Scrabble

5	Aspect of Playing Scrabble	Online Dictionary	i) Word challenge
			ii) Friendly competition
		Scrabble Set	iii) Feeling relaxed
		Face to Face playing and interaction	iv) Sense of Motivation
6	Scrabble Challenges	Observed	v) Feeling of great achievement
			vi) Feeling adventurous
7	Types of Scrabble Challenges	Face to face	Yes (2)
			No (10)
		Scoring Word challenge	Time limit (1)
			Challenge of building long words (1)

Findings

The findings of observations and interviews used to gather qualitative data for the study of how the Middle School Grade Seven students' vocabulary improved by playing Scrabble were encouraging. Initially, it was observed that the twelve students did not complete the twenty-word space of the word recording sheet and the lower five- word space was mostly empty in Phase one. But in Phase two there was an improvement observed by the researcher as the students were told to learn at least five new words every day. This was evident from the word recording sheets that the researcher collected and found out that the additional Five-word space in the word-documentation sheet were filled with new words. The students also started taking interest in making new words as they were making use of (a) Wali Timer, (b) Zyzyvva Software and (c) Collins Scrabble Word Dictionary version 2021 to check the words. The findings showed that students started making better words on the Scrabble board and required very little assistance of word checking through the dictionaries which the students were frequently using in Phase One. It was observed that the students learnt to make new words from simple words such as GHOST by adding G to HOST, adding W to ASH made WASH and the letter T was added to COME and a to make COMET.

The researcher was also able to observe an improvement in the vocabulary skills among the students through the website of Association of British Scrabble players' website (Home Page, n.d., 2023). Initially, at the end of week one, six out of twelve students were able to proceed towards six levels but after Phase Two, ten out of twelve students excelled in the levels. Thus, it was revealed from the observations that the students actively engaged in word construction while demonstrating

enhanced communication and teamwork during games.

The researcher received positive feedback from the students through the data collected from the interviews. For the students, the game was both fun and engaging way to learn new vocabulary which significantly expanded, according to the thematic analysis. They also made use of the recently learned vocabulary in written tasks with confidence in addition to using Scrabble as a technique.

The qualitative data also demonstrated how Scrabble promotes collaborative learning by highlighting student cooperation and good communication. Overall, the results point to Scrabble as a useful and engaging technique for raising vocabulary levels in the students of Grade Seven, encouraging language development at both individual and group level.

Discussions

After a detailed analysis of the results, it was clear that Scrabble has a positive impact in improving the vocabulary of the Middle School students of Grade Seven. Most of the subjects are taught in English where this research study was conducted and it is essential for the students to have a better understanding of the concepts that they learn since it is also beneficial for them in higher classes. Through the first research question, and on the basis of the preliminary study, the researcher found out that the students were not able to pronounce the words properly when made to read through textbooks in class. Majority of them also got bored and did not pay attention in class while the teachers were trying to teach them through textbooks. Through interviews it was found out that the students faced problems in pronouncing and remembering the words. It also impacted on their writing skills and most of them also made spelling mistakes which resulted in a lack of motivation in class. For this reason, the researcher came up with Scrabble as a technique to improve the vocabulary skills of the students.

The researcher through the second research question wanted to find out whether the students faced any difficulty while practicing Scrabble. From the observations and interviews, it was revealed that few students had issues in finishing the game on time and they found difficulty in making longer words at the beginning. In Phase-Two, through observations, the researcher found improvement in the word making ability of the students and the reason was that they challenged words using (a) Wali Timer, (b) Zyzyvva Software and (c) Collins Scrabble Word Dictionary version 2021. They found the above resources very exciting and it showed their engagement in playing Scrabble with interest. The students came up learning new words and were able to communicate with their peers well during the games. Both Phases One and Phase Two were conducted successfully by the researcher and there was no interruption while conducting the study. Thus, the teaching and learning process of using Scrabble to improve vocabulary skills of the Middle School students of Grade Seven was conducted entirely by the researcher in which the

students were successful in retaining new words and learned new vocabulary with motivation, team building and active involvement.

Conclusion

The researcher came up with the following conclusions.

There was a positive response of the students received from the interview results. The students were motivated playing Scrabble as it helped them in improving their communication skills. They also experienced greater word variety, and better contextual understanding of the subjects.

Most of the students through interview also responded that it improved their spellings as well as creative writing. They also felt relaxed while playing Scrabble with their peers in a friendly competition. Challenging words using interactive media was adventurous for them. It also gave them a sense of motivation and great achievement of exploring new words.

From the observations, it was also revealed that there was an improvement in memory retention as the students learnt different words while playing Scrabble and also came prepared with new words. Initially, a few students had faced the pressure of time limits of Scrabble and making long words, but during Phase two, most of the students were also comfortable using playing Scrabble.

Therefore, it suggests that there was an improvement in the vocabulary skills of the students of the Middle School Grade Seven using Scrabble.

Recommendations

The researcher would like to present the following recommendations:

Recommendations for the teachers

- a) The researcher recommends English teachers to practice Scrabble as a technique in teaching vocabulary in classrooms, since improvement was found in the vocabulary skills of the Middle School students.

- b) Scrabble can also be used by the teachers of other subjects as an opportunity for cross-curricular activities to help the students in enhancing their understanding of concepts of the respective subjects. The researcher in this study has integrated technology with Scrabble playing technique. The teachers are also recommended to apply the same technique to motivate and develop interest in the students to learn new words apart from the traditional methods such as textbooks and printed dictionaries.

Recommendations for the students

Students are recommended to use Scrabble game as a technique to learn new words to improve their vocabulary skills. They also need to challenge themselves by using more advanced words which will enable them to be self-reflective on their own performance using Scrabble.

Recommendations for the schools

It is recommended that the schools foster parents' involvement by organizing Scrabble workshops to aware them about the importance of

Scrabble in vocabulary development so that they also practice with their children at home.

Recommendations for the researchers

It is recommended that the next researchers should research on the usefulness of Scrabble as an educational technique for the students with special needs. This will ensure its effectiveness and adaptability in various learning contexts.

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