PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS ON LEARNING ARABIC LANGUAGE VOCABULARY THROUGH A CARD GAME

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Abstract

Vocabulary is essential in mastering any languages. However, learning vocabulary is tedious as it requires students to memorize numerous words and perform a lot of exercises. Thus, it is essential to provide fun learning activities for learning vocabulary in order to promote students' engagement in the learning process. Since the Arabic language is learnt in various levels of learning institutions such as schools and universities, a card game has a great potential to be utilized as a learning tool to enhance the learning of Arabic language vocabulary. This paper investigated perceptions of students on using a card game named as Ahsulu! in learning the Arabic language vocabulary at the intermediate level of Arabic language proficiency. This study involved students of Degree in Biology and Degree in Chemistry at Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan, Kuala Pilah Campus, Malaysia, who were selected based on purposive sampling. The data gathered by using an online survey and were analyzed descriptively by using Social Science Statistical Package (SPSS) Version 23. The findings suggest that using Ahsulu! as a learning tool could promote fun learning, ensure learning to take place and increase communication.

Introduction

Vocabulary is a set of words known and used within a language to construct meaning in written texts and communication at large. Students are required to know the vocabulary of the language if they want to master the target language skills. However, learning vocabulary is boring especially for students in the 21st century as they are exposed to digital activities (Ali & Elham, 2015; Le & Trunt, 2017). Moreover, learning vocabulary through the traditional learning approach is boring as it involves memorization of long lists and derivations, repetition of words, and fill-in-the-blank practice (Scrinever, 2009). In the case of learning a foreign language, learning vocabulary is challenging as it requires students to memorize a large amount of words and understand their meaning.

Learning vocabulary should be emphasized in language learning. This is due to lack of vocabulary knowledge can eventually affect the development of students' learning in four different areas namely in maintaining the social relationships with other students, in participating in academic learning routines, in comprehending the reading instructions, and in comprehending the content area instructions (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2005). Unlike other languages, in the Arabic language, there are different word formations that are complicated to learn. In Arabic, vocabulary is also known as "mufradat" which functions in constructing a complete sentence with a combination of a few words. Some students may find learning Arabic words as dull due to the inability to understand the vocabulary.

Using games does not only make language learning interesting but also promote learning to occur. There are various types of games for language learning that can help students in language learning for

instance by using Relay Word Building (Riahipour & Saba, 2012), crossword puzzles (Riahipour & Saba, 2012; Nur Fatin Fatihah & Albadri, n.d.; Vaishnav, 2015), Guessing Game (Riahipour & Saba, 2012), board games (Lee, 2012; Metom, 2016; Tengku Nazatul Shima & Rahmah, 2013), card games (Limantoro, 2018) and computer games (Ganiti, Politopoulos & Tsiatsos, 2018; Kwak, Casper & Talmage, 2018; Metom, 2016). With regard to learning vocabulary, using games allows students to remember the target words easily as this type of activity helps them to understand the meaning of the words better (Ali & Elham, 2015). Furthermore, games can help students to improve their vocabulary to which consolidates their learning of new words and remember the words as repetition of words will be less boring (Bakhsh, 2016). Games do not only create an atmosphere of meaningful communication but can assist language instructors in providing contexts for a fun learning experience (Silsüpür, 2017).

In order to make Arabic classes interesting as to sustain students' interest to engage in learning, Arabic instructors are expected to be resourceful in implementing efficient methods when teaching vocabulary in class. For the purpose of the study, a card game was chosen as a tool to learn Arabic through the fun way for several reasons. First, it is portable as it is small and lightweight, thus it can be brought easily anywhere and does not require a big storage. Second, it is not costly to create it as it depends on the paper and printing quality that are chosen for producing it. Third, it does not require the Internet connection in order to play it. Finally, developing in-house games can ensure that the game fit with the syllabus and students' learning needs.

This study aims to investigate perceptions of students on using a card game namely Ahsulu! in learning the Arabic language vocabulary at the intermediate level of Arabic language proficiency. The research questions of the study are as follows:
   a. Does Ahsulu! promote students to learn Arabic language through the fun way?
   b. Is Ahsulu! easy to use?
   c. Does Ahsulu! enhance students to learn the Arabic language vocabulary?
   d. Does Ahsulu! encourage student to communicate using the vocabulary learnt in class?

The study is important as to understand what makes a card game fun, easy to be played and how it promotes learning. The study, however, has several limitations. First, the sample was small and used purposive sampling approach, thus the findings were only applicable to the sample chosen. Second, the vocabulary selected for Ahsulu! was only limited to the intermediate level. However, it may give some insights towards understanding how card games can be utilized in helping students to learn vocabulary specifically the Arabic language vocabulary.

Literature Review
The issue of Arabic writing and communication problems among students persists when most of them are unable to optimize Arabic language vocabulary lessons and thus, it limits their ability to write and communicate in the target language (Zunita, Harun, Maimun & Nurul Kamalia, 2016). However, the teaching and learning of the Arabic language vocabulary are facing some difficulties due to the lack of supportive instructional teaching aids, which becomes a major concern and under the discussion of many researchers (Muhammad Sabri & Ghazali, 2012). Thus, the application of supportive instructional teaching aids especially in vocabulary learning is important as to enhance and improve language learning and acquisition. Many years ago, vocabulary were taught in the form of isolated words where students were given a lot of words and were asked to memorize them immediately. This process was very tiring and boring for the students which made the memorized words to be forgotten quickly (Silsüpür, 2017). For this reason, educators have come up with a lot of techniques that can be used in teaching vocabulary and one of them is by using language games as learning tools.

The application language games as learning tools in teaching vocabulary has attained a lot of attention. Donmus (2010, as cited in Ali & Elham, 2015) state his belief that "The value of educational games has been increasing in language education since they help to make language education entertaining" (p. 1497). In a similar vein, Uberman (1998) states that "games encourage,

entertain, teach, and promote fluency. If not for any of these reasons, they should be used just because they help students see beauty in a foreign language and not just problems that at times seem overwhelming" (p. 20). Since the teaching and learning vocabulary is tough, game-based learning helps both teachers and students to create a meaningful context for language learning process as "it helps teachers to create contexts in which the target words are useful and meaningful; and it also bring fun for students, thus help them learn and retain words more quickly" (Ali & Elham, 2015, p. 40). According to Wang (2011), students will look forward to participating in language activities and will also feel highly motivated to apply the knowledge that they have learned if they are aware that they are going to play some games after learning either grammar structure or vocabulary.

Due to their potentiality for further research, researchers, educators and instructional designers from all over the world have been attracted to invest their effort in the development of language games as learning tools (Muhammad Sabri & Ghazali, 2012). According to Silsüpür (2017), many researches have been carried out to investigate the pedagogical values of implementing games in language learning specifically vocabulary and it was concluded in her own study that games are not merely just for fun and have very little effects in teaching and learning but they contribute to vocabulary learning if they give students a chance to learn and practice the language. Dolati and Mikaili (2011, as cited in Ali & Elham, 2015) examined the effects of instructional games on facilitating students' vocabulary learning and found that language games have the potential as educational tools for teaching vocabulary and literary training. Huyen and Nga (2003), who conducted a study which focused on the perceptions and attitudes, and what language students gained through their learning with vocabulary games found that students enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere, the competitiveness and the motivation that games brought to the classroom. Mehregan (2014), who conducted another study on this area, found that the Iranian game-based experimental group performed the task better than the control group who learned the same vocabulary through the traditional method.

However, there are not much of researches done in developing card games to assist vocabulary learning. Muhammad Sabri and Ghazali (2012) developed a prototype for game-based learning that facilitates vocabulary enhancement through a compilation and variety of online games linked with open sources of connected dictionaries, online translators and games' glossary in both English and Arabic languages. While Nurkhamimi and Muhammad Sabri (2016) developed an Arabic vocabulary multimedia courseware with the references to the selected educational theories. These two studies focused on online game development to improve students' vocabulary knowledge rather than the development and implementation of board games such as card games that is more feasible in a language classroom.

For the purpose of this study, the pedagogical values of implementing language games in teaching vocabulary are divided into four categories namely promoting learning in the fun way, ease of use, enhancing learning and increasing communication skills.

Games promote learning in the fun way

Learning vocabulary is a hard work as students are required to face unfamiliar or unknown grammatical structures, words and texts (Mubaslat, 2012) and to understand, produce and manipulate the target words (Ali & Elham, 2015). Therefore, it creates a high level of stress in the classroom where it affects students' ability to learn as they often feel uncomfortable and insecure in class (Mubaslat, 2012). These psychological barriers undoubtedly affect students' ability to learn. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to provide a positive and stimulating environment which focuses on building the students' confidence and, at the same time, increasing the students' ability in using the target language. To help lower down their anxiety and encourage them to learn the target language, it is believed that language games are effective as stress-free tools of learning vocabulary (Wang, Shang & Briody, 2011; Ali & Elham, 2015), which bring fun for students, and at the same time, can help and encourage them to sustain their interest (Silsüpür, 2017). Apart from implementing language games in learning vocabulary establishes an enjoyable atmosphere and relaxation

(Mehregan, 2014 as cited in Fotini & Zafiri, 2017), the words which they learn can be more permanent (Silsüpür, 2017).

Ease of use of games
There are several researches that reported on the ease of use of language games to facilitate the overall vocabulary learning process especially the board or card games. Zhin and Chen (2013) indicated that most students prefer language games than the traditional method as the procedure of a game is easy to comprehend and the structure of a game is simpler. According to Fotini and Zafiri (2017), language games such as the board or card games are more feasible to be organized and implemented in a language classroom. In the same vein, Wu, Chen and Huang (2014, as cited in Fotini & Zafiri, 2017) state that card games handy and useful since they usually comprise dices and card. It is learned that the ease of use of games motivates the students as it was reported in Chen, Kuo, Chang and Heh's (2017) study that all students showed a positive response in terms of the ease of use of the user's interface. Additionally, both Zhin and Chen (2013), and Chen, Kuo, Chang and Heh (2017) reported that the ease of use of games acts as a basis for the students to explore the structure of a game in a convenient way.

Games enhance learning
Implementing language games in learning vocabulary provides a break for students either in the middle or a relief at the end of the class but at the same time, to ensure that students keep on learning new words, definitions, spellings and pronunciations during the break (Ayesha, Muhammad Asif, Sidra, Muhammad Kamal & Zafar, 2016). Not only that, the domains of words and relatedness can be developed by using language games since they enable students to practice and consolidate the new words better (Graves, August & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013 as cited in Fotini & Zafiri, 2017). When playing language games, students are required to move, do actions and recognize objects in a natural way. For example, when they play matching games where they need to find a match for a word, picture or card. These indirectly offer students with the opportunity to acquire a greater quantity of meaningful vocabulary more quickly and easily (Angelova & Lekova, 1995; Atake, 2003; Deng, 2006 as cited in Wang, Shang & Briody , 2011). In response to the influence of using language games in vocabulary learning, Ying-Jian, Hui-Fang and Briody (2011) have found in their study that students broadly agree that playing games can help them acquire new vocabularies as to win the games, each member is forced to speak the vocabularies that their teacher taught in class.

Games increase communication skills
Silsüpür (2017) claims that one of the beneficial effects of language games is they promote communication among students while playing. Not only that language games enable the students to participate in a stimulating and active context, but also to enjoy using the target language in a communicative manner (Halliwell, 1992 as cited in Fotini & Zafiri, 2017). This is supported by Ayesha et al. (2016) by indicating that language games increase interactions among students in a more friendly and competitive atmosphere which eventually will result in better communication skills. According to Huyen and Nga (2003), language games are useful to be applied in the classroom as they bring real world context into the classroom where they can practice and internalize vocabulary in a flexible and communicative way. As far as definition of a game is concerned, Toth (1995, as cited in Gruss, 2016) explains that games accentuate more on the success of communication than language accuracy.

Teaching Arabic Language Vocabulary Through A Card Game
Generally, a variety of card games that are available in the market can be selected for teaching in order to sustain students' attention in learning the Arabic language vocabulary. However, there are several shortcomings of using the available card games in the market. First, the cards may not fulfil the students' learning needs. For example, the cards may be designed for the level of proficiency that is lower or higher than the students' current proficiency. Second, the content of the card games is not matched with the syllabus. Finally, the themes used in designing the card games are not suitable or familiar with the local culture. Thus, this may hinder the students' participation in playing the card

games. Thus, Ahsulu! was designed and developed with the consideration of the proficiency level, syllabus and themes that are matched with the students' learning needs.

Methodology

The participants for the study were selected based on purposive sampling. They consisted of 56 students of Degree in Biology and Degree in Chemistry at Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan, Kuala Pilah Campus, Malaysia. There were eight males and 48 females.

The study was conducted in class during the class time by one of the researchers who taught the Arabic language for the students. The study had three steps as follow:

a. Step One
   The class instructor taught the vocabulary used in the card game to students in class. The students were required to understand, remember and apply the vocabulary learnt.

b. Step Two
   The students played the card game in class after the lesson with the presence of the instructor. The purpose of playing the card game was to help the students in understanding, remembering and applying the vocabulary learnt. The card game was played until there was a winner for the game.
   The card game was played by the following game rules:
   - The card game requires two to six players.
   - The cards are shuffled.
   - The cards are distributed to each player in the faced-down position.
   - The players are not allowed to see their cards.
   - When the game begins, the players turn over their cards, faced up.
   - They have to grab quickly the card containing a word and a picture that match, and shout "Ahsulu!".
   - The player who grabs the card has to pronounce the word in Arabic and say the meaning of the word in Malay.
   - Other players have to repeat saying the word in Arabic and the meaning of the word in Malay.
   - The player who gets the highest number of the matched cards is announced as the winner.

c. Step Three
   After the students finished playing the card game, a questionnaire was distributed to students through a Whatsapp message. The questionnaire was prepared by using Google Form. The questionnaire items were adapted from Attitude Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 2004).

The data obtained were cleaned for missing data and outliers. Then, the data were analyzed descriptively. The software used for cleaning and analyzing the data was Social Science Statistical Package (SPSS) Version 23.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to perceptions of students on using a card game named as Ahsulu! in learning the Arabic language vocabulary at the intermediate level of Arabic language proficiency. Based on the students' perceptions, a few major findings are presented in what follows.

Games promote learning in the fun way

Four items were developed to determine the above-mentioned effect. *1) Playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is fun 2) Playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is interesting 3) I am interested to play card game to learn Arabic vocabulary 4) I like to play card game to learn Arabic vocabulary.*

The overall results indicate that 60.9% of the students strongly agreed that playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is fun. Similarly, 60.9% of the students strongly agreed that playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary was interesting. While 53.1% of the students strongly agreed that they were interested to play card game to learn Arabic vocabulary and 51.6% of the students strongly agreed that they liked to played card game to learn Arabic vocabulary. Therefore, the results for items 1, 2, 3 and 4 prove that Ahsulu! promoted students to learn Arabic language through the fun way (Research Question 1).

Ease of use of games
Four items were developed to determine the above-mentioned effect. 5) *Playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is easy 6) Playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is comprehensible 7) Arabic card game is portable and handy to be carried anywhere as to learn Arabic vocabulary 8) Playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is easy as the game can be played in pair or in a group of not more than 6 players.*

Based on the responses given by the students, it was found that a dominating number of the students (57.8%) strongly agree that playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is easy. While for research questions 2 under the same category, 48.4% of the students strongly agree that playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is comprehensible. For research question 3, 50% of the students strongly agree that Arabic card game is portable and handy to be carried anywhere as to learn Arabic vocabulary. Finally, 51.6% of the students agree that playing Arabic card game in learning Arabic vocabulary is easy as the game can be played in pair or in a group of not more than 6 players. Thus, the results for items 5, 6, 7 and 8 indicate that students found Ahsulu! is easy to use.

Games enhance learning
Four items were developed to determine the above-mentioned effect. *9) Playing Arabic card game can help to develop domains of words that I need to learn 10) Playing Arabic card game can help to retain the words that I have learnt 11) Playing Arabic card game can help me to understand the words that I have learnt better and 12) Playing Arabic card game can help me to apply the words that I have learnt.*

Another group of items that was asked in the survey was on the effects of playing Arabic card game to enhance learning. The results reveal that 53.1% of the students agree that playing Arabic card game can help to develop domains of words that they need to learn. While 62.5% of the students agree that playing Arabic card game can help to retain the words that they have learnt. For research question 3 under the same category, 59.4% of the students agree playing Arabic card game can help them to understand the words that they have learnt better and 59.4% of the students agree that playing Arabic card game can help them to apply the words that they have learnt. Thus, the results for items 5, 6, 7 and 8 indicate that Ahsulu! enhanced students to learn the Arabic language vocabulary (Research Question 3).

Games increase communication skills
Four items were developed to determine the above-mentioned effect. *1) Playing Arabic card game can help to develop my self-confidence in communicating by using the words that I have learnt 2) Playing Arabic card game can help to improve my self-confidence in communicating by using the words that I have learnt 3) Playing Arabic card game provides opportunity for me to use the words that I have learnt and 4) Playing Arabic card game can help me to practice by repeating the words that I have learnt verbally.*

For this final group of items, 62.5% of the students agree that playing Arabic card game can help to develop their self-confidence in communicating by using the words that they have learnt. For research question 2 under the same category, 60.9% of students agree that playing Arabic card game can help to improve their self-confidence in communicating by using the words that they have learnt. For research question 3, 57.8% of the students playing Arabic card game provides opportunity for them to

use the words that they have learnt. Finally, for research question 4, 53.1% of the students agree that playing Arabic card game can help them to practice by repeating the words that they have learnt verbally. Hence, the results suggest Ahsulu! encouraged students to communicate using the vocabulary learnt in class.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ahsulu! is a significant learning tool as the students held a positive attitude towards using the card game in learning Arabic vocabulary. Using card games in learning the Arabic language vocabulary apparently facilitate students in learning as it was fun, easy to use, improves learning and enhances communication skills. Thus, more empirical studies need to be conducted in order to understand more on how card games support learning. Future studies should focus on specific aspects such as level of acceptance and motivation in playing card games. Other important aspects of research that should be emphasized is which game elements in card games that can promote fun and enhance learning. Thus, the findings may improve the design and development of card games.

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