TEACHING SPELLING THROUGH GAMES

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Abstract

Games have been believed to be good media in assisting teaching for years. Games are believed can promote learning become more interesting. Many studies have been conducted on utilizing games in learning. Some have proved that games can catch students' attention better than traditional media such as textbook. In this study, games were used in teaching students about spelling. Since spelling is the basic form of language, there are still contradicts in how to teach it better. The researchers believed that games can assist in enacting more interactive spelling course well. Thus, this research employed some spelling games to be used in teaching third grade students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Elementary school, Bungcala, Aceh Besar. The researchers wanted to know the students' responses after teaching by using spelling games. Thus at the end of teaching and learning process after four meetings by applying games in teaching spelling, the researcher distributed questioners to students asking their opinion about spelling games in learning spelling. The students' responses showed that they love to study spelling through games, games make them interested in studying spelling. Games let them work more in groups.

Keywords*: Teaching, Spelling, Spelling Games, EFL, Elementary School*

INTRODUCTION

Spelling is not simply about how to spell the words, but it connects the ability of how to read and write better. As Fearn and Farnan (2001) suggest that the needs of spelling is determined by the skills that they are learning. If the students are learning writing, they only need enough skills to read the piece of paper and edit it. Spelling is influential to the learner. Spelling supports reading and literacy. It is closely connected that the ability of reading derived from the ability of spelling. As spelling is a core thing in students' literacy acquisition, it is needed to observe this through pedagogical spectacles.

Some researchers have noticed this issue as an important piece of language acquisitions, those are Henderson & Templeton (1986); Ehri & Wright (2007); Ehri, Taylor & Wilce (1987); Cooke, Slee, & Young (2014).

Over decades the instruction of spelling in elementary school has been researched and needed to look for systematic teaching. Some researchers put their statement on the importance of spelling instruction and its connection with other skills. As Ehri (2000) stated that spelling and reading are like two undivided things. It depends on similar scope of knowledge. In addition, Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) stated, "Spelling

and reading build and rely on the same mental representation of a word. Knowing the spelling of a word makes the representation of it sturdy and accessible for fluent reading" (p. 86).

What's more, the ability to map out the letters and its combination to sounds is supported by the automaticity of reading words (Ehri &Snowling, 2004). Therefore, when teacher applies memorizing technique in teaching spelling it just does not work and effective. Because not all words are easily distinguished visually, thus it is hard for children to memorize more than a few dozen words except they have developed insights into how letters and sounds correspond. It should be noticed that learning to spell needs both instruction and the integration of information about print, speech sounds, and meaning, which supports memory for whole words, which is used in spelling and word reading.

Besides reading skill, spelling also benefits writing. In writing, spelling is the basic skill instead of punctuation, grammar, etc. Spelling is one of the fundamental subskills of effective written communication. The purpose of teaching spelling should be focused on the development of skill to be able to correctly represent written language not a temporary memorization. In writing, poorer

spellers may limit their word choice, as they write only the words they can spell and eventually lose track of their thoughts when they get stuck spelling a word. Singer and Bashir (2004) stated that writers use valuable cognitive resources needed for higher-level aspects of a composition when they think too hard about how to spell. Thus spelling is required to be able to write better.

The urgency of spelling in learning other skills required teachers to have a good spelling instruction in the classroom. It should be remembered that English words have different pattern of spelling that involves phoneme and written system. First and foremost, beginning spelling instruction should always emphasize the phonetic nature of spelling. The fact is written English is based on a phonemic alphabet. Therefore, students should be taught the phonemic awareness because it is a critical thing in spelling development.

However, the best instruction of how to teach students spell well is still debatable. According to Schlagal (2002) spelling instruction has been presented as rote memory tasks, teacher-selected list form, numbers of syllables, orthographic principle, study-test verses test-study-test approach, most frequently used words, memory-based, basal spellers, orthographic generalizations,

curriculum-based content vocabulary lists, and individualized instruction. Even though educators and practitioner disagree on which of those strategies are best to teach, but on one thing they agree that spelling is crucial.

Starting back at the study conducted by Presley, Rankin, & Yokoi (1996) on Eighty-three primary-level teachers from the United States, who were rated as effective literacy teachers by a superior, participated in a national questionnaire about essential practices for literacy instruction, some of those teachers creatively created literacy-rich environments for students, had classroom libraries, displayed student work, used chart stories and poems, posted word lists, used learning centers, read stories aloud to students, and had opportunities to listen to taped stories. They believed using more and various teaching methods was effective to promote spelling proficiency on students. Other surveyed teachers reported differently that they used teaching phonic from phonic workbook and never teach phonic in isolation (Fernandes, 2017).

The development of spelling instruction has brought some divisions in the way of approaching it. It is divided into broad approach, narrow approach and irrespective approach. The broad approach focuses on a series of stages that capture developmental patterns signaling changes in student performance. Stage theory, is qualitative in nature, places patterns of development in various time frames (Bear et al., 2004; Reece & Treiman, 2001).

Another research and it is considered as a narrow approach was conducted by Apel, Masterson, and Hart (2004) who posited that phonological, orthographical, and morphological knowledge, as well as mental graphemic representations, simultaneously interact during all levels of spelling development. In another study Apel, Masterson, and Niessen (2004) further indicated that older students must access various linguistic components to meet the demands of conventional spelling as the complexity of words increases. In their view, misspellings occur because the linguistic complexity of the word exceeds the student's ability to utilize one or more of the linguistic components.

The narrow approach, in comparison to the broad approach, focuses on the analysis of individual linguistic features and allows the educator to know about what make students misspell words (Reece & Treiman, 2001; Silliman, Bahr, & Peters, 2006). The analysis allows educators to view what the students use but confuse. This somewhat limiting analysis focuses on one linguistic feature at a time.

Whether using the broad or narrow approach, educators can gain valuable information about a student's spelling development for instructional purposes.

On contrary to broad and narrow approach, irrespective of approach, focuses on the structure of written language progression. Moats (2005) asserted that children benefit from being instructed about the structure of the written English language in a logical progression from sounds and symbols to syllables and morphemes, as it is what good spellers know. Knowledge of letter patterns within syllables, spelling patterns, and meaning parts of words are learned as students' spelling vocabulary expands.

Joshi, Treiman, Carreker, and Moats (2008-2009) stated that spelling instruction supports reading success for there is a high connection between reading and spelling, as both are dependent upon language proficiency. Appropriate spelling is important in developing literate members of the society who can easily communicate through reading and writing.

On a very recent study, conducted by Duke (2016), she posted a blog regarding literacy practices in need of abandonment. These abandoned practices included the weekly spelling test. She stated, however, that according to Palmer and Invernizzi (2015),

whole-class spelling tests are less effective than an approach in which different students have different sets of words depending on their stage of spelling development. This approach emphasizes analyzing and using the words rather than taking an assessment

Some Breakthrough of Teaching Spelling

An article from www.righttrackreading.com suggested an effective spelling instruction for teachers and also parents. It recommended some foundations that should be understood for the instruction run well. The following are the foundations that are needed by the students in improving spelling proficiency.

1. Developing phonemic Awareness. Phonemic awareness is the key element in spelling development. It is needed because through phonemic awareness students are able to recognize and differentiate the sound within spoken words in order to translate these sounds to print. To strengthen the phonemic awareness of the students, there should be training for them.

2. Understanding phonemic nature of spelling. Students need to understand written English based on phonemic code.

3. Learning the phonemic code. The student needs to learn the complete phonemic

code. The English phonemic code is complex and the student needs to learn the complete code in order to handle these complexities. The student needs to learn the code systematically beginning with the basic code and then adding the complexities with vowel combinations, r-controlled combinations and other intricacies. Although there is code overlap (more than one way to write a sound), irregular and unexpected spellings, English is based on this phonemic code.

4. Approaching the process of spelling phonemically. The student needs to base their spelling on converting the sounds in the spoken word into print. They need to write the phonemic code for the sounds in the word. Spelling needs to be approached as recoding sound to print. Once again phonemic awareness is a critical skill. The child must have the phonemic awareness to recognize and distinguish the sounds within words. If your child has a phonemic weakness, you need to help the child strengthen their phonemic awareness.

5. Acquiring knowledge of spelling patterns and learning helpful guidelines. The student needs to learn and practice the common spelling patterns that are used in English. There are also guidelines that can help us learn correct spelling. While there are exceptions and irregularities most words follow common patterns. There are also a number of helpful guidelines to aid us in accurate spelling. Children are better able to achieve spelling success when they learn and practice these common patterns and helpful guidelines.

6. Learning/memorizing specific and 'tricky' spellings. For accurate spelling the student does need to learn the correct spelling for common words and begin memorizing the specific spelling pattern used for particular words. Accurate spelling can be tricky and does require remembering which spelling pattern is used within certain word.

Games in Teaching

There are a lot of techniques in teaching English language. Games are believed can be a good alternative in making classroom interesting and fun. Games also initiate students to pay more attention in learning. Games are also beneficial in assisting teacher to develop context in which the language is used. Games also accompanied students in building a good

relation with other students to participate actively in classroom activity.

Students' communication ability is also built up through games because they will use their oral communication to express their thought and also deliberately their writing ability in transferring information to their partners. Language games can support the experience of using the language in classroom instead of just studying the use of it. The use of most language games in particular can provide the use of many language items that the simple use of conventional drill exercises. Furthermore, language games result meaningful depending on the time of the practice of the language itself, as well as the quality of the language game. In addition of quality, language games give the opportunity to practice in real communication.

Sigurðardóttir (2010) in her study reveals some reasons why games are worth enough to be employ in English language classroom. First of all, games are fun, which is extremely important, because they can help activate students who may have been inactive before, due to lack of interest. Keeping students active is vital because teachers will never be able to actually teach students anything unless they can get them to participate in their own learning process.

Other thing that makes games a good booster in learning language is games can help students to build relationship and to feel equal. When the students feel comfortable they can be friendly and good classroom atmosphere occurred. Third, games can make the students practice the language items in real situation, thus games can be a very good way to practice this skill because they can easily be used to reenact various situations from real life and provide students with practice in their fluency. Fourth, students also can practice language in any kinds of situation and games can fill this gap by providing any kinds of role play games to be enacted in the classroom.

Fifth, ESL students need to be emotionally involved, meaning they need to feel something while they are exposed to the language. Strong emotions, such as happiness, excitement, amusement and suspense allow students to feel positively about their learning situation and are therefore likely to have a positive effect on language learning. Sixth, games are good for shy students and students with low confidence, and that applies specifically when playing takes place in smaller groups because then they get a chance to speak in front of fewer audience instead of having to express themselves in front of the whole class.

Seventh, games can be a good strategy when teaching various subjects because they are very likely to spark interest amongst students. They can be used with students of all ages, and when they are used with other teaching methods they create diversity which is ideal for school work. A study that was undertaken in Iceland in 2006 shows clearly the need for diversity in schools. Many participants in that study complained about the lack of diversity, and that they wanted more of it in order for their learning to become more fun and progressive in their school (Lovísa, Laufey & Samúel. 2006.p. 34).

Using games, classroom atmosphere will be more attractive and initiate more interactive activity. Teacher on one hand can vary the language context in which the students need to practice it either communicatively or written. Huyen and Thu Nga (2003, p.104) stated that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for useful practices and review of language lesson, thus leading towards the goal of improving learner's communicative competences".

However, when there are many benefits of games in language classroom are stated, nevertheless, there are some points need to keep in mind that games should be selected well before applying it into the classroom. Therefore, when games are used in the classroom the teacher must keep this in mind and control the game in the right way. Also he or she must make sure that every participant has a positive experience because the classroom must not become a place where students feel vulnerable or picked on in. Another thing that is important to acknowledge is the fact that not all games fit the classroom environment, or all groups of students, and that it can be hard finding the right game. In fact, it is good to keep in mind when selecting a game that a recipe for a good educational game is one that balances both fun and challenge (Sugar.1998.p. 16).

Another point teachers need to keep in mind is to choose wisely when it comes to selecting a game to use in the classroom because; although one game might be perfect for one teacher or a particular group of students it can be terrible for another teacher or group of students. First of all, the teacher has to look at the group that will be participating in the game and he or she then has to set out a goal for the group which the game should aim towards (Jones. 1998.p. 14). Selecting an appropriate game for a specific group of students who are working towards a specific goal can be tricky because, for example, they need to make sure that the game is relevant to the subject, that it fits their

students'' age and, teachers must remember not to select a game that is too complicated because that might result in a loss of interest amongst the students, or even defeat.

The purpose of using language games in English classrooms according to Wright et al., (2006) must be central to learning. It can be used to support the lesson plan, to reinforce a topic, or to teach in an indirect way, but it must never be to waste the valuable time of language classes. The use of language games must be implemented in class for academic issues, and the aim must be learning. Teachers can take advantages of using language games in English classes because learners have the opportunity to use the language, but in a different context, because they feel the classroom as a comfortable place to practice the foreign language.

Based on the data informed above, the researcher in this research would like to state that games can be useful to initiate more interactive and fun classroom atmosphere. Therefore the learning process can run well and effective. In this study the researcher would like to know the perception of students in learning spelling through games. As mentioned earlier games give many benefits in assisting teaching and learning. However, a few researches have been conducted on perception of students in teaching and learning spelling through games. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study in order to know whether applying games in teaching and learning spelling would be effective or not.

METHOD

The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative method. The process of collecting data is through questioner. The questioner type of questions is close and open ended questions. It provides the answers with yes and no and also inviting free response for some questions. The questions are designed to know the students' responses about using games in teaching spelling. The questions are ten and at the end of the questions, there is a rating scale, whether the students like when the teacher utilizes games in learning spelling or unlike it. The questioners were distributed to 27 students of class III-b. This class was chosen because this is the only class that has more meeting time left compared to the other third grade.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected and analysis, the result of the study shows that most of the students feel happy when they are seated in group and play games. They tended to be more enthusiastic to be in the classroom situation that is more fun and competitive. In

brief the result of the study can be portrayed in the following table. The statements of the questioner are already translated into English for the importance of this article.

Table.1 students' response of the questioners

No.	Number of statements	Students' responses		
		Yes	**No**	**Others**
1	When I heard it is time for spelling I feel happy.	15	12	
2	I learn how to spell outside of class? When?	10	17	After going back from school, during lesson review time
3	I like when teacher instructs me to sit in the group and play games?	20	7	
4	I would like to play competitive games. Like what?	18	9	Board race, word relay.
5	I like to win in the game	27	0	
6	Getting score and winning the game make me excited	27	0	
7	Spelling is difficult for me without game	19	8	
8	Spelling games help me learn spelling better	20	7	
9	I am happy when learning spelling through game	25	3	
10	If I could rate how much I like spelling games I would say it is	I don't like it (0-1-2)	I slightly like it (3-4-5-6-7)	I love it (8-9-10)
		5	5	17

Illustratively, from the students' answers when they are asked about spelling course, only half of the students in the class stated that they love spelling. But almost a half of students in the class don't like it, this is represented by the number of 15 students said yes and 12 of them said no. unfortunately, spelling is not enthusiastically learned by the students besides at school. It is proven by the question number two whether they learn spelling outside of the school or not. Only 10 students answers yes, and usually they learn it during lesson review time and after school when they come back home, but the rest of them stated that they never learn spelling at home. It will be a factor of students' weakness in spelling.

On the other hand, when calculating the answers of the students for question number three, surprisingly, most of the

students answer yes when there is a direction from the teacher to sit in the group and play games. Only 7 out of 27 students said no for this question. From the answers, it can be assumed that the students love grouping activity and playing games. For the following statement about types of games to play, the students answer that they like to play competitive games, such as board race and word relays games; and it is about 18 students said yes for this statement, and only nine students didn't like competitive games. However, to know their motivation in learning of using games, the fifth statement " I like to win in the game" is answered yes by all of the students. It is respectively followed by the next statement "Getting score and winning the game make me excited" in which all of the students answer yes. Well, basically, children love playing and winning the games, however, when it links to learning sometimes the students feel frustrated and stressful. In this case, the teachers should modified well the activity of spelling course with the games, thus the children subconsciously can enjoy learning.

When it goes to spelling related statements, students answered that spelling is difficult to learn without games and it is represented by 18 students stated yes, and only nine stated no. The next statement is answered by majority of the students yes, when the spelling games help the students learning spelling better is stated. Only seven students do not think the same that game assists them in learning spelling better.

Statement number nine that " I am happy when learning spelling through games" is answered by 25 students in the class, it is a big number comparing to the previous question. It is perhaps, even though games is interesting enough to play, but some students think that it does not really affect their spelling proficiency, but at last, learning spelling through spelling games is found more interesting than without games. Thus, only three said no for statement number 9. The last statement in the questioner that is distributed to the students is asking them about their like and unlike of spelling games when it is utilizing in teaching spelling.

The rating scale is given in this statement by the phrases" I don't like, I slightly like and I love it". The number for each scale is also given. And for this rating statement, the majority of the students answer that they love it by 17 number of the students, and the rest for" I don't like and I slightly like", each of them is represented by five students. It is however, sum up the response of the students about the use of spelling games in teaching spelling.

From the data above, it can be seen that games can be a good medium for teaching students about spelling. They tend to love spelling course when game is utilized. It is previously proved that games have been brought a good impact on the students' mood in learning language. However, spelling as it has been a debatable issue in learning language of how to teach it well seems boring when it basically only taught with regular technique such as memorizing, modeling, practice and repetition. Thus, teaching spelling by using games can be an alternative for the teacher to boost students' mood and motivation to learn and also capture their attention more.

CONCLUSION

Spelling is a fundamental skill to teach for children in order to make them good at other skills such as reading and writing. it has to be taught in orderly and systematically followed the foundation of teaching spelling. Besides utilizing some spelling games in the classroom activity to promote spelling proficiency, the effective ways of teaching spelling should be paid attention by the teacher. Phonemic awareness and phonemic codes should be taught to the students in spelling course.

They need to know the foundation of phonemic and phonic in English, when they have a good foundation, surely it will be easier to teach them spelling and instill some spelling games. Spelling games are only alternative for the students who feel classroom activity is boring and their attention and motivation to learn are distracted. However, spelling games are media in promoting students spelling interest and motivation to learn.

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