

IMPROVING VOCABULARY THROUGH IMPLEMENTING SONG AND GAME-BASED LEARNING STRATEGY OF ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Iwan Fauzi

FKIP Universitas Palangka Raya

i_fauzi@edu.upr.ac.id

Abstract

Although children learn a language faster than adults, they do not learn through traditional language teaching methods. Children can learn languages better through more fun activities so that language learning activities look natural to them as if they are not aware that they are learning a language. To attract the attention of young learners in learning a language, songs and games can be used as an effective learning strategy to teach young learners to speak English. This study shows the benefits of fun learning strategies of English to the young learners. There were 30 pupils of third graders at Muhammadiyah Primary School (SD-Muhammadiyah) Palangka Raya and one teacher of English at the school were modeled to this experimental study. This study using one group pretest-posttest design examined the effectiveness of implementation of song and game-based learning strategy of English vocabulary to Indonesian young learners. A comparison of learners' proficiency in expressive and receptive vocabulary of English was made before and after the implementation of the learning strategy. Results indicated that the young learners' proficiency in English vocabulary after implementing the strategy outperformed the learners' proficiency before the strategy implemented.

Keywords: young learners, vocabulary learning strategy, songs & games, primary education.

I. Introduction

The government policy of teaching English in primary schools has emerged when the decree of Culture and Education Minister number 060/U/1993 was issued on 25 February 1993. The policy enables teaching of English in the primary school as a subject of local content to be learnt by young learners. Since 1994, English has officially become the local content of a learning subject in the primary schools.

Although English is still not considered yet as a second language for the people of Indonesia, the existence of this foreign language has

been introduced to the basic education level or even to the very young learners. There are two main reasons why children should learn the foreign language. *First*, they have very good listening and memory on those ages since the climax of their language competence reaches 12 years old or below. By this reason, the children are able to learn imitating phonemes quickly and accurately so that they are able to master features of the foreign language without any difficulties. *Second*, the children have less handicaps during these young ages besides they are able to respond the language expression spontaneously.

Furthermore, some experts on related studies agree that the most appropriate time to learn another language (other than native one) is between six and thirteen years of age. This is argued by a theory that supports early language learning based on the critical period hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967; Bickerton, 1981). The theory states that there is a biologically specific period of life when language can be learnt more easily. Both researchers state that individual's language acquisition reaches a critical stage during his/her puberty because a person's particular ability to acquire a language declines after the critical period.

Meanwhile, the amount of time spent in learning a language is a major factor in improving one's foreign language proficiency. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) state, "when language learning begins earlier, it can go on longer and provide more practice and experience, leading ultimately to greater fluency and effectiveness". In relation to this, a question may come up "how long does it take for children to learn English?" There is a common assumption that young children can learn to speak English in a short period of time; e.g., few months. This is in contrast to adults that may need years to master English.

However, each children has a different level of mastery in how quickly they master English, even though they are in the same learning environment. This difference level of mastery, according to Paradis et.al., (2009: 3-4), can be due to these

learners' characteristics such as language aptitude, age of acquisition, socio-economic status, and quality and quantity of English exposure. Further, Nyikos (1987) mentions some factors affecting learning proficiency such as teaching method, teaching materials, intelligence, learning strategy, learning motivation, and learning behavior, etc. In this case, good language teachers generally implement appropriate learning strategies in facilitating their students for learning.

When a teaching and learning of English involves young learners, it should be understood firstly who are the young learners in this context. Philips (1994:5) defines young learners as; "...children from the first year of formal schooling (five or six years old) to eleven or twelve years of age." Based on this definition, it is exactly remarked that young learners are the students whose ages in the primary school level. In general, the incompetence of primary school students in implementing learning strategies because they have few learning experience. To improve their learning experience it is necessary to know what effective learning strategies used when teaching them, and adapt the learning method according to their level.

Teaching English in the primary school, in particular, is really different with the strategies used in its above levels. It is more complicated, for instance, than teaching English for the students in high schools. In the primary school certain techniques and strategies are needed in order to make

learning situation interesting and fun for the young learners. In this respect, teachers should have some various techniques in teaching. The techniques can be developed in a simplest form. The most important is that the techniques should be affordable in its implementation and, of course, should be suitable to the need and condition.

However, though young learners have an extraordinary ability to learn languages, the teaching methods and techniques used for them are definitely different from adults. When teachers apply the wrong teaching method to their students, it can bring results that are far from what are expected. Therefore, another important thing that also needs to be considered is what makes children suddenly lose their motivation to learn a language. When they feel uncomfortable or depressed during language learning then it can be a factor that hinders children's motivation to learn language as well. In addition, it is difficult for young learners to understand the theoretical concepts of the grammatical rules of a language so that the complexity of the grammar rules they learn can also make them uncomfortable in learning the language. Still, children cannot concentrate on boring learning activities for a long period of time because they have a short level of attention spans. As a result, most children are bored and uninterested in attending long-term lessons in the classroom. Another reason that is not less important is that children suddenly stop their motivation to

learn a language when their teacher gives them excessive corrections while learning. Ara (2009) points out that many classroom teaching practices are still traditional in nature so this may have the effect of preventing children learn the language well.

Thus, children will learn a foreign language better if they have more chances to be more exposed to the language they are learning. Another way for them to acquire a foreign language is to use all the senses they have and by getting fully involved; such as by observing (watching and listening), and copying sounds and gestures. Certain techniques can be applied in language learning classes in order that children are directly involved in learning activities, for instance by ensuring a language learning environment that is free from the learner's anxiety. Through fun learning activity is one of the best ways to get young learners interested in learning language. Using songs and games is the most effective and fun strategy for young learners to learn a foreign language.

In terms of song, nothing can be as effective as music or song in children's language class. Zhogi and Shoari (2015) investigate the effectiveness of songs on the young learners' ability to master English vocabulary. The result shows that the use of songs in learning English has a significant effect on young learners' vocabulary mastery. In addition, it was also depicted from the study that songs can create a comfortable atmosphere during the learning process and also reduce students'

anxiety so that through songs they are not burdened with excessive memory during the learning process. Then, Ma'rifat (2017) attempts to investigate the song-based activities and stages in teaching English vocabulary. The result shows that song has proved to be better than conventional method in facilitating young learners to learn English vocabulary. Still, songs can help teacher facilitate his/her students as a valuable teaching and learning tool. In addition, Millington (2011) proves in his study that using songs in teaching English not only be useful for teaching vocabulary but also helps learners improve their listening skills and pronunciation.

It is undeniable that children have a taste for music and songs. It is very common for English teachers around the world to facilitate their students learning a language using songs so that it can be fun and helpful for children to improve their vocabulary mastery of the language they are learning (Cakir, 1999). Through music and songs children are much easier to imitate and remember language than words are simply 'spoken' because music is a source of motivation, interest and pleasure. This is in line with Fransischa & Syafei (2016) that state teaching English should be able to make activities more interesting for young learners, not only burdened by giving them more exercises. By allowing them sing a song while learning they will be enjoyable and it helps them to memorize new words easily. Again, Cakir (1999) argues that by using a song, children can be taught the

sounds and rhythms of the language effectively in addition to reinforce the structure and vocabulary of the language being learned. This is due to the fact that songs offer repetition of words and high-frequency expressions.

Just like songs, games also create a fun atmosphere for children in language classes. It has been extensively studied that games in learning English can improve learning, especially for young learners' language classes. This is the reason why, according to Vernon (2009), games are so useful and one of the most effective language learning media since the game facilitates learning becoming more fun, and children are ready to be involved in it and not only attend the class as a must to follow. Through games they also pay more attention to what they are doing because when they enjoy what they practice, they feel better and do something better too. This is a learning cycle that benefits and helps them.

To have advantages of games in language learning, both McCallum (1980) and Lindsay & Knight (2006) Knight (2006) imply the advantages of games related to their usefulness because games are able to liven up the atmosphere during the lesson. McCallum (1980: 9) also emphasizes that an informal setting is one of the benefits of using games when he says: "Students, in the informal atmosphere of game play, are less self-conscious and therefore more apt to experiment and freely participate in using the foreign language." Philips (1994) also

provides another fact which is not less important to be underlined that children enjoy playing games and they don't have to notice that they get into trouble while playing. In specific, Lindsay and Knight (2006) emphasize that there is an element of socialization in a game. Children must obey a rule because in playing the game they can find their own abilities and compare them with other students. Instead, games can also help children with their self-assessment.

In relation to language teaching, playing games in language class just like playing other games in other class subject engaging learners in a healthy competition and also can help them learn more language features. "As long as no one is forced to participate, competition can be positive and encourage player discovery, examination and learning" (Vernon, 2009). Accordingly, to arrange and to create the right type of language games can encourage favorable and positive competition in the classroom. Al Neyadi (2007) in his research found that games in English class were able to improve students' ability to memorize vocabulary; encourage student interaction; and increase student motivation during the lesson. This is similar with what Wang, et. al., (2011) investigated to the primary school students in relation to using game in teaching vocabulary. They found the results that there is a significant positive correlation among the effect of using games on increasing students' motivation and vocabulary mastery as well as their proficiency in English. This indicates

that students who have higher motivation or faster vocabulary mastery through playing game in learning English can show better language performance as well.

In accordance with some reviews abovementioned, if songs and games are used properly by the teacher, children can have fun as well as enjoying the lesson, and acquire a language at the same time. In relation to this study, its purpose aims to examine the effects of learning strategies of English vocabulary by using songs and games to the young learners. Therefore, it answers the following questions:

- (1) Does the proficiency of young learners' vocabulary differ before and after they learn English facilitated by song and game strategy?
- (2) Does the song and game-based learning strategy give significant effects in term of expressive and receptive vocabulary to the young learners?

II. Method

This research used a quantitative research method by implementing one-group pretest-posttest design. The pre-test was employed by the researcher to see the proficiency levels of English vocabulary mastered by the young learners. Then, the researcher made a treatment to the sample by teaching vocabulary using playing games and songs.

There were 30 young learners recruited to become the sample of this research. They were taken from the third grade learners of SD

Muhammadiyah Pahandut Palangka Raya. The sample's ages ranging from 7 to 8 years old covering 18 females and 12 males. The researcher also recruited an English teacher of the school to assist the researcher in implementing the learning strategy to the sample. Before doing teaching, the teacher was trained by the researcher how to do with the games and the songs as techniques of learning English vocabulary to the young learners. While teaching and learning process, the teacher and the learners were also under supervision from the researcher. There were six times of treatment to the learners by implementing three games and three songs. These games and songs were implemented in line with the targeted vocabulary forms. The table below is the description of song and game contents.

Table 1. Vocabulary targeted through song and game-based learning strategy

Week-1	Game: <i>Colour</i>	Names of different colours
Week-2	Song: <i>Rainbow</i>	Names of things based on rainbow colours
Week-3	Song: <i>If you're happy</i>	Names of body parts
Week-4	Game: <i>Bingo</i>	Names of fruit
Week-5	Game: <i>Family</i>	Names of family members
Week-6	Song: <i>Old McDonald</i>	Names of animals

Six weeks after the implementation of teaching, the same test was applied again to measure young learners' postapplication competence. The quantitative data were analyzed statistically. The scores obtained from the tests were tested using paired-samples t-test to examine whether song and game-based learning strategy significantly improve English vocabulary of the young learners.

In order to obtain the data about the children's language proficiency in English vocabulary, a series of assessments were administered to assess the children's expressive and receptive knowledge of the target vocabulary words before and after the treatment.

1. Expressive vocabulary questions.

The expressive vocabulary question consisted of two parts: English naming and Expressive definition. In the naming of things it required children to label pictures in English. To test the children, they were given a picture and asked to name it with the prompt, "What is this?" Then, in the expressive definition questions, the children were asked to define each word with the inquiry "Tell me something you know about (*a wheel*, for instance)" or "*Coba sebutkan apa yang kamu ketahui tentang (roda).*" Each young learners was encouraged to give an additional feature of the word with the question. The pictures used for these tasks were taken from students' workbooks.

Expressive question example:

"wheel"

(i) *English naming:*

Prompt: "What is this?"

(ii) *Expressive definition:*

Prompt: "Tell me something that you know about wheel."

2. *Receptive vocabulary questions.*

The receptive vocabulary questions tested the children with three pictures that they had not seen before in which they were similar in size, color, and quality of illustration (based on Dunn & Dunn, 1997). The child was asked to identify the picture of the word being said. The teacher used the prompts "Show me (*a wheel*, for instance)" or "Tentukan mana (*sebuah roda*) dari ketiga gambar ini" (stated in Indonesian) and the child was asked to denote to the picture of the questioned item.

Receptive question example: "wheel"
Prompt: "Point to wheel."



Figure 1. *Receptive vocabulary description*

Then questions from the expressive and the receptive test items were provided before the treatment began and after the treatment finished. Expressive questions are categorized into two: naming in English, and expressive definitions. Naming in English is scored by calculating the number of words the child can identify with a maximum score of 20 (of 10 words to be named). The expressive definition questions were scored using a conceptual scoring scheme adapted from Bedore

et al. (2005) and Justice et al. (2005). This scoring scheme was selected because it allowed the child to respond in either native language (Bahasa Indonesia in this context) or English. The child's answers were scored based on the definitions they provided. The grading scheme has four categories: no knowledge (0), emergent knowledge (1), partial/incomplete knowledge (2), and complete knowledge (3). Each child received a score of 0 to 3 on each item, and the maximum score for the expressive definitions was 60 by assuming 3 points for each correct word multiplied by all 20 words.

The receptive questions were scored by calculating the number of items correctly identified by the children with a maximum score of 20 (10 words to be identified). The researcher also asked other two English teachers independently scoring each of the expressive questions, to resolve any discrepancies in the scores obtained from the samples and this should met the inter-rater reliability above 80%.

III. Finding and Discussion

Findings

Three assessment indicators were used to measure the children's vocabulary proficiency of the target words: (1) English naming, (2) expressive definitions, and (3) receptive vocabulary. Table 2 below shows the scores of three assessment indicators and the sum scores of pretest and posttest.

Table 2. The result of learners' scores of pretest and posttest

Learners' Codes	Pretest (X1)			Sum	Posttest (X2)			Sum
	EN	ED	RV	Total X1	EN	ED	RV	Total X2
L01	10	8	28	46	18	16	53	87
L02	10	12	30	52	18	20	55	93
L03	8	8	26	42	16	16	51	83
L04	6	8	25	39	14	16	50	80
L05	8	10	27	45	16	18	52	86
L06	12	10	35	57	20	18	60	98
L07	16	12	36	64	20	20	60	100
L08	8	8	24	40	18	16	49	83
L09	10	10	26	46	20	18	51	89
L10	8	8	24	40	18	16	49	83
L11	8	6	25	39	18	14	50	82
L12	12	10	29	51	20	18	54	92
L13	14	12	37	63	20	20	60	100
L14	14	14	38	66	20	20	60	100
L15	10	8	28	46	20	16	53	89
L16	8	8	26	42	16	16	51	83
L17	8	10	28	46	16	18	53	87
L18	12	10	37	59	20	18	60	98
L19	12	8	30	50	20	16	55	91
L20	6	8	24	38	14	16	49	79
L21	10	8	26	44	18	16	51	85
L22	16	14	40	70	18	20	60	98
L23	12	12	39	63	18	20	60	98
L24	10	10	31	51	16	18	56	90
L25	8	6	24	38	16	14	49	79
L26	8	8	26	42	16	16	51	83
L27	6	8	24	38	14	16	49	79
L28	12	12	30	54	20	20	55	95
L29	10	10	29	49	18	18	54	90
L30	8	10	26	44	16	18	51	85
Mean	10.00	9.53	29.27	48.80	17.73	17.40	53.70	88.83

Note: EN: English naming; ED: Expressive definition; RV: Receptive vocabulary

The vocabulary proficiency of the young learners was considerably low before the implementation of the learning strategy was carried out in which the result of mean scores was only 48.80. This result was contributed by the scores of English naming getting 10.0 of 20; of expressive

definition getting 9.53 of 20; and the score of receptive vocabulary reaching 29.27 of 60. These scores indicate that the young learners did not achieve a half of maximum scores for each indicator assessed. This means English vocabulary of the third grade learners are still very poor in

proficiency. However, after six-week intervention of the learning strategy the figure 1 below describes that there

is an improvement of learners' vocabulary after the intervention.

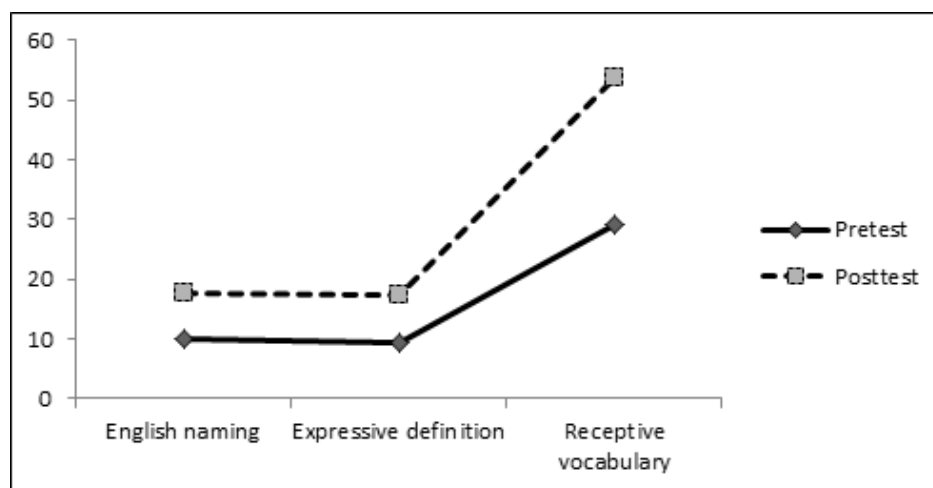


Figure 2. Improved scores of vocabulary proficiency before-and-after intervention

With regard to the intervention of learning strategies carried out during six weeks, the third grade learners had achieved a very good proficiency in English vocabulary in which the average score achieved was 88.83. This number was contributed by the scores of English naming getting 17.73 of 20; of expressive definition getting 17.40 of 20; and the

score of receptive vocabulary reaching 53.70 of 60. These improving scores indicate a good progress in learning English vocabulary after implementing certain learning strategies to the young learners which achieve more than three-fourth of maximum scores for each indicator assessed.

Table 3. Summary results of t-test on learners' vocabulary proficiency

Learners' proficiency	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Pretest Std.Dev	Posttest Std.Dev	t-value (df=29)	Sig. (2-tailed) at 99%
1. English naming	10.00	17.73	2.729	2.016	24.616	.000
2. Expressive definition	9.53	17.40	2.080	1.831	84.916	.000
3. Receptive vocabulary	29.27	53.70	5.044	4.044	102.571	.000
Overall	48.80	88.83	9.334	6.978	68.754	.000

The result of t-test applied to the means of each test (before and after intervention) gave us the following values: $t = 68.754$; $df = 29$. This value is

significant at the $p < .001$ level. Of three vocabulary proficiency assessed in this research, the results also show the song and game-based learning

strategy contributes significant improvement to the young learners in mastering English naming ($t=24.616$; $p= <.001$), in expressing word definition ($t=84.916$; $p= <.001$), and in memorizing receptive vocabulary ($t=102.571$; $p= <.001$). In the light of the results, it can be claimed that the implementation of song and game-based learning strategies to the young learners is considerably significant to improve their English vocabulary proficiency.

Discussion

This study examined the effect of instruction by using songs and games to the English vocabulary proficiency of young learners. Before the learning strategy was employed to the learners, the researcher tested their vocabulary proficiency to find out an initial mastery of English vocabulary achieved by the young learners. The result of the test became the parameter to measure the success of the learning strategy after it was implemented.

In research question one, the researcher tested whether the proficiency of young learners' vocabulary differs before and after the children learn English facilitated by song and game strategy. The result of pretest indicates that the young learners were very poor in their proficiency of English vocabulary. In fact, contents of test were one level under theirs in which the learning materials were mostly found in the third grade of primary school. Obviously, the mean score achieved was only able to reach 48.80 which is

much lower than 60.00—a standardized passing grade. When it is compared to the result of posttest, the learners' proficiency is highly improved where the mean score achieved reaches 88.83 which is far passing through the standardized passing grade.

Based on both results, there are two points that can answer the research question one; first the vocabulary proficiency of young learners after the intervention is highly different from that of before the intervention. Then, the young learners are more proficient to master English vocabulary after the song and game-based learning strategy is employed comparable to the initial mastery. Therefore, the learning strategy by using songs and games is evidently effective to improve the young learners' vocabulary mastery. As to the second research question, the data demonstrate the existence of a very significant effect of the implementation of song and game-based learning strategy to the young learners in which the implementation of the songs and games on teaching is able to give positive result to the young learners. This is, in specific, shown by the significant achievement in either expressive or receptive vocabulary mastery. In this sense, the result of this study confirms what Zhogi & Shoari (2015) argue that the use of song had a significant effect on young learners' performance; and also in line with what Wang, et. al., (2011) consider that using games can enhance faster vocabulary acquisition and learners' English proficiency.

IV. Conclusion

As the art of teaching English to young learners needs specific skills to be performed effectively, teachers need to understand how children learn a language. Teaching English to the young learners with fun looks simple, yet complex. Therefore, teachers need references to guide them how to create a 'joyful nuance' in the learning atmosphere. Consequently, materials and methods of teaching in the primary school should be in line with learners' cognitive development. The teachers may say they have been able to use interesting songs and games during the teaching and learning process but they do not think whether those songs and games have been suitable to be implemented to the young learners. For this reason, to select a suitable game or song based on cognitive, physical, and emotional levels of the children is really a heavy duty for the English teacher of primary school. In this sense, the needs and interests of the children in learning English including a lot of useful fun activities should be taken into consideration.

References

- Al Neyadi, OS. (2007). OS. 2007. The Effects of Using Games to Reinforce Vocabulary Learning. Retrieved from: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.696.2297&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Ara, S. (2009). "Use of Songs, Rhymes and Games in Teaching English". *The Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics*, 2(3), 161-172.
- Bedore, LM., Peña, ED., García, M., & Cortez, C. (2005). "Conceptual versus monolingual scoring: When does it make a difference?" *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 188-200.
- Bickerton, D. (1981). *Roots of language*. MI: Karoma Publishers.
- Cakir, A. (1999). "Musical activities for young learners of EFL". *The Internet TESL Journal*, 5. Retrieved on March 20, 2014, from <http://www.iteslj.org/Lessons/Cakir-MusicalActivities.html>.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Curtain, H. and Dahlberg, CA. (2004). *Languages and children: Making the match: New languages for young learners, Grades K-8*. Third Edition. New York: Longman
- Dunn, L., & Dunn, L. (1997). *The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III (PPVT-III)*. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.
- Dunn, R. (1983). "Learning Style: State of the Science". *Theory into Practice*, 23(1), 10-19. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Fransischa, A. & Syafei, AF. (2016). Using Songs to Teach English to Young Learners. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 5(1), 251-258.
- Halliwell, S. (1992). *Teaching English in the primary classroom*. New York: Longman.

- Justice, L. M., Meier, J., & Walpole, S. (2005). "Learning new words from storybooks: An efficacy study with at-risk kindergartners". *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 17-32.
- Lenneberg, E. H. (1967). *Biological foundations of language*. New York: Wiley
- Lindsay, C., & Knight, P. (2006). *Learning and Teaching English: A Course for Teachers*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Ma'rifat, D. (2017). A case study of using songs in teaching English vocabulary to young learners. *Journal of English and Education*, 5(1), 49-55.
- McCallum, G. P. (1980). *101 word games: For students of English as a second or foreign language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Millington, NT. (2011). Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners. *Language Education in Asia*, 2(1), 134-141.
- Nyikos, M. (1987). "The effect of color and imagery as mnemonic strategies on learning and retention of lexical items in German". Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, IN: West Lafayette.
- Paradis, J., Anna, K., & Darcey, MD. (2009). *Working with Young Children who are Learning English as a New Language*. Alberta. Alberta Education. Early Learning Branch.
- Philips, S. (1994). *Young learners*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Vernon, S. A. (2009). "Benefits of using games in the classroom". Retrieved on March 20, 2014, from www.teachingenglishgames.com.
- Wang, YJ., Shang, HF., & Briody, P. (2011). Investigating the Impact of Using Games in Teaching Children English. *International Journal of Learning & Development*, 1(1), 127-141.
- Zhogi, M. & Shoari, E. (2015). The Effect of Using Songs on Iranian Young EFL learners' vocabulary performance. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 9(1), 24-33.