

Critical Review on the article:

"Using online games for teaching English vocabulary for Jordanian students learning English as a foreign language"

Muhanna (2012)

Vocabulary development and vocabulary comprehension are key at English as a foreign language (EFL), and it is regarded as crucial for reading comprehension among English language learners (Marzano, 2005). This particular article, entitled "Using online games for teaching English vocabulary for Jordanian students learning English as a foreign language" it deals with an issue which has been growing during the last decade (Marzano, 2006) in terms of researchers' interest towards it. The article presents the result of a research conducted in Jordania in 2010 to 160 tenth grade students, the idea was to find out to what extent, vocabulary mediated by online games were learned more effectively than those taught by memorizing tasks. The results of this study show that participants who learned vocabulary through online games were more successful at post/tests conducted by the researchers at the end of the research. In order to organize the following review on this article, we personally think it is important to focus on two main topics addressed by the article: Theoretical support on the research's theme and study design. Muhanna (2012) informs her study by quoting authors addressing the vocabulary building topic, however there is a lack of researchers and therefore articles regarding online games facilitating vocabulary learning, the researcher presents a set of authors stating that games are an effective strategy for vocabulary learning, Glasser and Strauss, (1967) we personally think the author should differentiate between games and online games, mainly because both are set in different conditions and even more important, both of them require of different cognitive processes from learners Glasser and Strauss, (1967) Considering the focus of this study, we personally consider that as a relevant term to be explored (online games), there should be more articles and authors informing the theoretical framework of this research , we personally think it must be clear for readers the particular characteristics of online games in order to shed light to a deeper understanding of the study, and the conditions in which learners were facilitated vocabulary during this research.

On the literature review, Muhanna (2012) presents games as valid option when it comes to learning vocabulary, however a doubt comes up regarding fluency, Jimenez & Perez, (2012) assert that learners must be exposed to

words within a meaningful context in different and recycling settings, in such way students are given more chances to learn a word and then, to develop fluency with the words in use. However, Muhanna (2012) is not clear in this specific point. In our personal opinion, we consider this theoretical framework does not present enough theory to support the assumption of online games facilitating vocabulary. We agree with Marzano (2006), he asserts that learners must be given as many opportunities as possible to retrieve a word. Muhanna (2012) quotes Schultz & Fisher (1998) who claim that games have become an appropriate way to engage students to learn vocabulary; nevertheless, we did not find any article supporting this idea for online games Gu, (2005). Points out an interesting perspective about online games, he states that for some learners, online games could be overwhelming in terms of sudden distractions created by the game itself, another aspect that we personally think is key to understand for this study is in relation to the words offered during the online games. Jimenez & Perez (2012) aim at identifying different types of words; they sort them depending on their usage, the jargon, and the function of words within texts. Muhanna (2012) concludes that many authors assert online games are helpful in order to facilitate vocabulary learning among English language students however, as the article shows; we cannot conclude that literature framework supports this particular idea. In our personal opinion, we consider this study has specific issues to be reviewed, not only in theoretical concepts, but also in regards the study design and methodology. According to Creswell and Miller; (2000) participants must be selected by fulfilling certain characteristics which allow researchers to study specific populations and their insights or out comings.

Muhanna (2012) conducted this quest to 10th graders students, the information provided by the author is almost unexciting, she doesn't state the age of participants nor their background information, in this case, we cannot have a light of how is these learners profile neither important information about them such as actual English proficiency, we personally think that a simple vocabulary pre-test cannot tell how proficient is a learner, as English proficiency has a direct impact on vocabulary building and viceversa (Jimenez and Perez, 2012) this means that Muhanna (2012) provides no evidence of learners English proficiency, which according to authors is key for a deeper understand of words and lexicon building (Marzano, 2005; Jimenez and Perez, 2012) however, this particular study leads us to wonder if results could be significantly different among younger learners, our question comes up by taking into account what Lugo-Neris, et all, (2010) assert, they claim children have shorter

attention spans than adults. They state that younger learners must be highly engaged to their current tasks mainly because of their attention spans, in that sense, we personally think that on-line games could deviate students attention from the primary task hence the result of this could be, a low understanding of words and meaning, in regards to the on-line games, Muhanna (2012) does not show a clear explanation on how are the multimedia games conserved, this fact is particularly important when it comes to English as a foreign language (EFL) mainly, because of the instructional design that such games must pose in order to facilitate language and not merely expose learners to it. in that sense we personally think that Muhanna (2012) misses information that should be key in order to understand the process made by the participants to gain the showed results in the findings, Marzano (2005) points out that facilitators must realize the importance of providing students with more chances to retrieve a word, within different significant settings that will allow learners to have a better and a that will allow learners to have a better and a wider range of use for these words.

We personally think that web is becoming a powerful tool for facilitators to teach and promote learning and crosswords, puzzles, and matching games could be easily digitalized by means of programs and multimedia processes, unfortunately Muhanna (2012) does not point out what kind of games were used during the study in order to reach the results already mentioned by her. we personally think that there is another issue to mention, regarding the strategy used to convey the usefulness of on-line games at word learning was just memorizing them, Muhanna(2012) called this approach as the traditional one, however, it could have been more interesting if control groups were facilitated by games without any technological device, in that case, it could be easier to differentiate the plus given by on-line settings to a task almost equal engaging as playing word games in real or traditional classroom settings in the case the validity of findings could be more evident to view. Muhanna (2012) shows as topic to discuss, the language used among learners at the time that students were attending online games, she asserts that learners interactions were held in Spanish, it means that negotiations of words meaning were not developed in target language, according to Jimenez and Perez (2012) negotiating meaning can offer a unique opportunity to develop communicative skills, this fact might lead learners to have a demanding cognitive process, and also to ground words meaning, as they are learners within a meaningful context, in this case learners have not only meaning but also the usefulness of the lexicon. Nevertheless there is still a component not mentioned in this study which we personally consider to be important in word learning, when do we say a learner has

succeeded at understanding a word? what indicates a learner has understood a word's meaning? Monzo & Calvo (2002) state that a learner succeeds when his/her understanding of the word exceeds theory and allows him/her to use it in different variety of settings and contexts.

Marzano (2005) agrees with this statement, he argues that words are understood only when they are accurately used for the learner in a wide range of contexts. In the following point I will attempt to narrow this article's topic to a local context, such as the colombian one. For that purpose, we will attempt to propose possible scenarios for the research study under similar conditions as the ones showed in Muhamna (2012). First of all, we consider as a limitation for conducting a similar study in Colombia, the low accessibility that some institutions have to technology and websites' resources. In that sense, this fact might represent a serious problem to researchers exploring this strategy, as a valid source to facilitate lexicon. Passing by this difficult, we would suggest three different types of participants, we personally think that could be interesting to analyze how this strategy impacts or not children, teenagers and adults within an English language course, in that way, it could be evident how online games affect vocabulary among English language learners at different stages of cognitive development, and to what extent age is related to learners' disposal to work through digital gadgets. Patterson and Pearson, (2004) state that age could be a determinant issue when it comes to technological tasks. Another aspect that I would recommend in order to improve Muhanna's (2012) study design, regards the tasks that learners develop in the online games. In that way, the researcher would know what kind of activities foster, in a better way, vocabulary building among each group of participants (i.e. children, teenagers and adults) this means that researchers have the possibility to be aware of the participants' improvement according to the activities and games proposed by them. This particular suggestion is key in agreement with Marzano (2005) who claims that it is important to be aware of the activities conducted to develop vocabulary, in order to promote a well-organized and sequential work. On the other hand, this study could be improved by sorting words according to their usefulness and purpose within the online games, we personally think it is important for these kind of activities to provide words that work in different ways in phrases and, in that way, variety will be provided, regarding function and meaning of vocabulary (Jimenez & Perez, 2012) In our personal opinion, we consider that vocabulary is crucial in order to develop communicative skills and reading comprehension, however researchers in Colombia are not aware of this reality, therefore it is difficult to find articles related to lexicon building in a

local context.

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LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE"**

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PEREIRA 2013