

Journal of English Language
Teaching and Learning
No.9,2012

On the Effect of Using Games, Songs, and Stories on Young Iranian EFL Learners' Achievement

Seyyed Ayatollah Razmjoo

Associate Professor, University of Shiraz

Saeed Mehrpur

Assistant Professor, University of Shiraz

Behnaz Darban

MA in TEFL, University of Shiraz

Abstract

The objective of the present study was to identify and examine the influence of instructional tools, namely, games, songs and stories on young Iranian EFL learners' achievement utilizing a quantitative design. To conduct the study 65 Iranian EFL learners, divided into an experimental group and a control group, learning English at Navid English Institute, Shiraz, Iran, participated in the study. The data were collected through two instruments: a pre/post- achievement test, and audio-recorded interviews, both designed by the researchers. The data obtained from the administration of the test and the interviews were analyzed using independent samples t-tests and paired samples t-tests and the findings were compared to describe the influence of employing instructional games, songs and stories on participants' achievement. Findings drawn from the analysis of data revealed that the implementation of pedagogical tools used in the study can significantly affect the learners' language achievement, realized through their listening, speaking, and writing ability and their vocabulary and grammar.

Keywords: instructional tools, games, songs, stories, young learners, language achievement.

-تاریخ وصول : 1391/7/12 ، تأیید نهایی : 1391/8/15

1. Introduction

During the past few decades, teaching and learning a new language have become a demanding task due to the emergence of new methods in foreign language teaching and the developments in diverse areas, such as linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. Bound up with the current changes, communicative language teaching, in which learners receive knowledge actively and authentically, has been applied to new materials (Losiewicz, 1988).

Authentic language can be introduced into foreign language classrooms through the use of engaging, play-based, and creative activities such as games, songs and stories. These activities are enjoyable and motivating; therefore they create a desire to continue learning and make learners want to come back (Tavil&Soylemez, 2008). Moreover, different forms of realia can be used in the classroom to keep foreign language learning fresh and to support textbook learning since students seem to be fond of working outside of the textbook. All these activities are considered as the right techniques and additional forms of input, pedagogically used to teach a foreign language to young learners and what better way to reach them than through employing engaging activities such as games, songs, and stories.

Along the same line, teaching a new language to young learners has gained importance. Contemporary language learning approaches support the principle that children learn best through discovery, experimentation, and being motivated to learn (Tavil&Isigag, 2009). Children tend to learn from the environment around them relatively quickly because they want to play, have fun, and make friends. Therefore, the learning and teaching processes should be well-matched with the nature of children learning.

There are beliefs and assumptions about how children learn a language, compared with how adults do that. The young children see language as something they know and consider themselves as insiders even if they know just a few words under their command. On the other hand, adults see language as something they learn. They do not consider themselves as someone who knows the language. In this

way, they are always waiting to learn the language, wondering when they will be good enough to join in, and that puts them on the outside (Wray, 2008).

1.1. Statement of the problem

One of the criticisms these days is that activities which have some elements of fun and are at the same time educational are not employed pedagogically in language classrooms, but merely used for the fun of it. Therefore, the problem here is that these instructional tools have not been properly assimilated into language classrooms, and they have been regarded mostly as fill-ins rather than pedagogical tools which can potentially improve language learning.

1.2. The Role of Games, Songs and Stories in Language Teaching/Learning

Researchers in diverse fields including philosophy, psychology, history, and education reflect their perspectives on the definition of the term 'game' in different ways, but all share the idea that there is a relationship between games and cognitive development (Mongillo, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) refers to game as a human social activity which is a major source of advancement. Several researchers (e.g., Bruner, 1983 and Fromberg, 2002) have conducted investigations on the role of instructional games, especially on primary levels. These games sometimes enhance students' interest and motivation. In addition, making use of games in language teaching might help students to get closer to the target culture. It gives students the feeling and sense of enjoyment, energy and inclusiveness. Moreover, Prensky (2001) believes that games engage people as they motivate players to reach their goals, satisfy learners when winning, are fun through enjoyment, and generate the learners' creativity when trying to hit upon a solution.

There is a link between linguistics and musicology as songs possess both the communicative feature of language and the entertaining feature of music. Songs have rhythmic and melodic content representing a specific form of communication in a linguistic sense. Ayotte (2004) suggests that the use of songs in the foreign

language classrooms reflects the inherent rhythmic nature of life itself. Songs are considered as an effective tool in pedagogy as they create a relaxed atmosphere in which learners respond positively to the process of teaching (Clarks, 2007; Fonseca Mora, 2000; Kolb, 1996; Kramer, 2001; Murphey, 1990; and Rixon, 2000).

Another powerful instructional tool is story telling. It makes students familiar with the target culture, as individuals must relate and communicate with each other within cultural contexts. Stories provide a network of associations which allow children to connect their personal experiences to the outside-world (, , & Kamen, 2004). In the same direction, Casla, Poveda, Rujas, and Cuevas (2008) believe that children are exposed to the values, norms, restrictions, and expected behavior patterns through stories. Moreover, Tivil and Soylemez (2008) state that stories are helpful since they give the chance of participation to the students.

1.3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

The common thread throughout the theoretical framework of this study is the widespread belief that teaching and learning are shared social and cultural experiences. It has been mentioned that literacy and learning are above all social in nature and the study brings forth the Vygotskian theory of learning which focuses on the social construction of knowledge, and the dialogic and collaborative nature of language which leads to language development.

In addition to learning through social interaction and active construction of knowledge, the theory focuses on the fact that learners' group participation affects the act of communication. In line with the theory of constructivism, Vygotsky (1978) further proposed the notion of ZPD (zone of proximal development) which is the distance between the learner's existing developmental state and their potential one. Therefore, learners are able to do some activities that they have not yet learned, but are capable of doing with the assistance of other learners, more capable students, and adults. Games, songs, and stories all have a feature in common; that is, their social nature. In fact, all these activities are collective and cooperative activities

requiring the coordinate efforts of a group of individuals who would like to learn something together.

1.4. Significance of the study

As there is more concentration on traditional learning (Mongillo, 2006), it seems to be essential and at the same time helpful to develop curriculums based on constructivist beliefs. The study is significant as there has been little research on young learners' learning English as a foreign language and no research has been done on the simultaneous effect of using games, songs, and stories on students' language achievement.

1.5. The Objective and Research Questions of the Study

The objective of the study is to find out whether activities such as games, songs, and stories affect young language learners' achievement in learning English as a foreign language. The present study intends to investigate the extent to which these activities help students to reach a higher level of achievement in a different environment and its main purpose is to determine the influence of employing instructional games, songs, and stories on young learners. In line with the objective of the study, the following research questions are proposed:

1. Do games, songs, and stories significantly affect language achievement of young EFL learners?
2. If so, on what components and skills of language do they exert more effect?

2. Literature Review

Although there is a wealth of research on the cognitive and attitudinal effects of using authentic activities, such as instructional games, songs and stories to improve students' learning and quality of teaching, there is a dearth of research concerning the simultaneous effects of games, songs, and stories. The available literature denotes that there are positive outcomes from the application of instructional games, songs, and stories. In what follows ideas and studies indicating the effect of games, songs, and stories on language learning, especially in children will be provided.

2.1. Ideas about and Studies on the impact of games on language learning

One of the advantages of applying games is that they help students improve all the skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1984). Moreover, Malouf (1988, cited in Mongillo, 2006) believes that instructional games facilitate learning and encourage learners to improve different skills. Cekaite and Aronsson (2005) consider language play as an instructional tool that is motivating and facilitative of L2 learning. Bruner (1983) also emphasizes the effectiveness of using games to develop learners' linguistic and cognitive abilities. Language which is used during game-plays is more like everyday language used for talking with friends or at home which is uncharacteristic of formal and standard classroom instruction. When learners get involved and are absorbed in game-plays, they do not wait to be called upon to answer, do not answer the questions in a rote fashion, or await others' approval for correct answers (Mongillo, 2006). Rustick (2007) has explicated the effects of grammar gaming on learners' writing skill. The author believes that the primary premise of grammar gaming is practice the already learnt concepts, not to simply have fun, nor is it a way to teach terminology or prescriptive grammatical rules. She also contends that learners must be encouraged to have fun with language as all learners deserve to experience that pleasure. A number of studies have also been conducted which show the positive effects of games on language learning. In what follows some of such studies will be reported.

Tavil and Isisag (2009) focused on teaching vocabulary to very young learners through games and songs. The 46 students under investigation were divided into two groups; group A received the instruction through games and for group B the teaching process was carried on through songs. A pre and a post test were administered to all students. Valid and reliable results were achieved in pre and post tests. The conclusion drawn from the work was that teaching vocabulary to young learners through games was more effective than other methods of vocabulary presentation.

Ajibade and Ndububa (2008) explored the effects of word games, culturally relevant songs, and stories on a group of students' (N=100)

motivation in a Nigerian English language class. A pre-test/post-test control group design was used and the students were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The analysis of the data revealed that use of word games and culturally relevant instructional activities was beneficial for these students, as they served as an effective motivational strategy that contributed to better performance in learning English.

Yip and Kwan (2006) conducted a study on the effectiveness of using vocabulary sites and they compared sites which included games to sites which included activity-based learning. Through implementing games, they engaged learners, who were tired of rote learning of vocabulary, in the learning process. The subjects were graded as homogeneous before treatment. Three teachers were involved in the study, each teaching one class in the control group and one class in the experimental group to reduce any potential impact on the learning outcome due to the varying teaching styles of different teachers. The results show that learners playing games tend to learn better, retain words for a longer period, and retrieve more words than those learning through activity-based approach.

Cekaite and Aronsson (2005) illustrated the need to integrate language play in L2 learning. The work is based on analysis of children's language play in spontaneous contexts. The data were collected in a Swedish school comprised of seven to nine-year old beginning learners, who had recently arrived in Sweden. The class met five days a week, four to six hours a day. During the lessons, children's spontaneous involvement was encouraged. At the completion of the study, they found that language play not only encourages students to expand their vocabulary but it also provides situations for authentic language use. In conclusion, the results suggested the cooperated aspects of language play, how language play is a collaborative issue, initiated by learners themselves.

2.2. Ideas about and studies on the impact of songs on language learning

The addition of melody in songs facilitates learning and music helps learners develop cognitive skills and at the same time improves their language skills. Children learn language appreciation, rhyme and vocabulary use through singing songs (Yuliana, 2003). Yuliana (2003) further claims that singing a song is considered a pleasing achievement by learners and since the words are repeated several times, they are easily memorized. Another inherent characteristic of songs is that they are learned by heart, leading to children's linguistic development. Similarly, Fonseca Mora (2000) highlights the influence of music which serves as a catalyst for the process of language learning since music lowers the learners' affective filter and provides students with an atmosphere in which they can relax and enjoy the language learning process. Freshwater, Sherwood, and Mbugua (2008) suggest the use of music and physical play to show children the value of learning and to promote meaningful learning. The researchers concluded that through music and movement children's emotions, language mastery, energy, pride, and self-esteem can be developed. Kramer (2001) and Nuessel and Cicogna (1991) discussed the association of songs to Krashen and Terrell's (1983, cited in Ayotte, 2004) Input Hypothesis. The hypothesis indicates that the input must be comprehensible enough to lead to learners' language acquisition and the development of their linguistic competency. Kramer (2001) and Nuessel and Cicogna (1991) believe that learners can understand vocabulary and grammar in a context where songs serve as a sort of comprehensible input. Booth (2001) believes that children can be introduced to new vocabulary, word patterns, word sequences, and phonemes through repetitions in songs. Regarding the impact of songs on language learning, some studies have been conducted which show this effect. What follows contains a report of some of such studies. Ayotte (2004) did an experimental study on two groups of third and fourth semester college learners studying French to investigate whether using educational songs affects grammar acquisition, specifically the acquisition of verb forms. He used five songs each focusing on one specific verb form- present, past, future, imperfect, and conditional. Learners' grammatical accuracy was evaluated through comparing the results of an immediate and a delayed post-test. It was found that the experimental group who listened to songs outperformed the control group on present, future, and conditional verb forms with more

grammatical accuracy on the immediate post-test, while on the delayed post-test they outdid the other group on present and conditional verb forms.

Fisher (2001) conducted a study on the effectiveness of using songs and their influence on 80 students studying in kindergarten and first grade of a bilingual school. The students were divided into four groups, two of which received instruction through a great deal of songs while the other two did not. The results of the study proved that the experimental groups outperformed the control groups over a 19-month period of instruction.

Lowe (1998) illustrated the impact of songs on second grade French immersion students in New Brunswick. The only difference between the control and the experimental group is 15-minute instruction each session through the integration of songs. The researcher concluded that the experimental group outperformed the control group on vocabulary, grammar, and rhythmic patterns and the students were motivated by the songs' inclusion.

Murphey (1990) put forward the idea that songs are effective tools in education. He conducted a study on 49 students who had all experienced the song-stuck-in-my-head phenomenon in some language. Analysis of the results showed that first the melody and then the lyrics from the songs get stuck and stored in memory until needed for a specific context. Therefore, he believes that songs positively influence learners' long and short-term memory.

2.3. Ideas about and studies on the impact of stories on language learning

Tavil and Soylemez (2008) state that employing stories in the classroom helps learners to appreciate reading as an enjoyable activity. They add that stories are helpful since they give the chance of participation to the students and they are effective means of instruction as long as students can identify themselves with the characters in an atmosphere with low anxiety to assist the child to build up his confidence in such a non-threatening atmosphere. The researchers suggest that story telling can develop learners' intellect through diverse activities such as sequencing, ordering, and making

predictions. They believe that students' learning can be enriched through fun and motivating stories which help them develop positive attitude towards foreign language learning. With respect to the impact of telling stories on language learning, there are some studies which indicate this effect. A report of some of such studies is provided below.

Tavil and Soylemez (2008) carried out a study on the effectiveness of storytelling as a means of vocabulary teaching to very young learners. While words are best learned in context, stories might be an appropriate pick as they contextualize the words in a repetitive fashion. The researchers wanted to find out whether words presented to 12 five-year old learners through stories are recognized at the recognition level or not. The data collection instrument used in the study was pre-post tests. They made use of a "point to" test as students are not literate in their mother tongue. A story was told to them for three weeks and at the end of the study it was found that all of them had learned the words at recognition level and even four of them were also able to produce the words.

Viggiano (2003) employed an action research method on the effectiveness of telling stories to students, involving four classroom teachers and their students in the study. Over the treatment period, she found that story telling can be a powerful form of meaning making and a helpful teaching tool. To better prepare the learners academically and emotionally, the teachers taught within a framework that was comprehensible for the learners, based on their cultural background. The researcher found that narrative story telling could help Latino immigrant students connect their original culture to their new American culture by tapping their imagination.

As can be seen, based on the literature review presented above, many studies have been conducted tackling the issue of games, songs, and stories and their effects on language learning and teaching. However, there seems to be a dearth of study attempting to find out the simultaneous effects of such instructional tools on language learning in children, especially in an EFL context such as Iran. Therefore, the present study seeks to work on the influence of these three pedagogical tools as effective factors on young learners' language achievement.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The total number of students participating in this study was 65 female students enrolled at Navid English Language Institute in Shiraz, Iran. All the participants, being selected through availability sampling, were exposed to the same material, *Let's Go 2*, being taught by one of the researchers. Since the number of students in each class of the institute was not large enough, initially two intact classes were assigned to the experimental group and two to the control group to have enough number of participants for the study. However, because what was done in both the two control groups and the two experimental groups was completely similar, it was finally decided to treat the experimental groups (N=30) and control groups (N=35) as two large groups. Learners ranged in age from 11-13, and represented a variety of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

3. Instruments

In this study, a pre-post test and a pre-post interview were used as data collection instruments with the purpose of finding out the students' homogeneity, and determining how much students had gained at the end of the treatment.

3.2.1. The achievement test

The pre- and the post-tests were the same to reach valid and reliable results and the aim was to determine how much the participants had achieved after the treatment. The pre-test was administered to both groups unexpectedly in the first session of the course. The test included 50 items: listening (15 items), vocabulary and grammar (27 items) and writing (8 items). The full score for the test was 100.

3.2.2. Interview

The interview was also the same to achieve reliable and valid results and the pre-treatment interview was applied in the first session. The interview included 10 open-ended items and the full score was 100. The interview items were all designed to be related to the topics focused in students' book. And the interviewer did her best to run the interview as authentically as possible to help the students feel they are just talking to her not answering a series of questions based on which to be scored later.

In order to see whether or not the test administered to the participants was reliable and valid, a number of measures were taken. The reliability of the test was estimated using Alpha Cronbachcoefficient after being administered as a pre-test to both groups. The index obtained was .91 revealing that the test was a reliable measure. As for validity, the content and criterion-referenced validity of the test was measured through the following procedures. The test was shown to a number of English teachers who had taught the book used in the study, and they unanimously stated that it was a good test with respect to its content for the students participating in the study. Since no standard test of proficiency for the young learners at this level was available to be correlated with the constructed test, to have a numerical index of validity, the researchers assigned a score to each student at the end of the study and correlated these scores with their scores on the post-test. Here, the researchers' subjective judgment of the students' overall proficiency or performance was employed as a criterion (Farhady, *et al.*, 1994). The correlation coefficient obtained was .82 proving the test as a valid test. With respect to the reliability of the pre- and post-treatment interviews, the recorded voices of the participants were carefully listened to and rated once by one of the researchers and once by two of them individually and the obtained indexes of intra-rater and inter-rater reliability were .89, and .85, respectively.

3.3. Data collection procedure

Over the course of this study, the data were collected through a pre-achievement test, pre-treatment interview, treatment, post-achievement test and post-treatment interview. The length of the study was 10 weeks. The classes met twice per week for two hours. Some effective pedagogical tools were applied as both teaching tools through which the experimental group was taught and as a sort of supplementary material through which the issues were practiced, reviewed, and reinforced. The aim of the study was to determine whether the young learners in the experimental group could achieve a higher level of performance through the application of pedagogical games, songs, and stories, compared to the ones who were taught without the employment of these instructional tools.

The first session began with the pre-test and the pre-treatment interview. All the participants were required to take the test in class prior to any implementation of the treatment in the same amount of time under the supervision of the researchers. While taking the test, as students had not practiced the issues included in the test, they constantly complained about its difficulty. To ensure that students would not give more attention than they should to the items in the pre-test, no mention was made of the subsequent administration of the test as a post-test, and the researchers did not provide any feedback to the students on the test items. The interview was also administered in the same session. Students were interviewed one by one and their voices were recorded. After the administration of the pre-test and the pre-treatment interview, the treatment started from the second session.

As mentioned before, one of the two classes was assigned to Group A (Experimental Group) and the other one to Group B (Control Group). The experimental group received instruction through the application of some instructional games, songs and stories, while the control group did not. These instructional tools were used to both teach and at times to reinforce what had been taught. One of the researchers implemented 20 instructional games, 10 songs, and 5 stories during the study.

Games: In selecting the games, their level of appropriateness was taken into account. They all were matched to the vocabulary and the

grammatical structures of the book. i.e., *Let's Go 2*. During the study, learners did the tasks in an interactive fashion which was supervised by the researchers. The games used in the study were applied to reinforce and recycle the new vocabulary and also to practice grammatical structures. They were assigned to students both individually and in groups. The games were mostly done within a time-limit, in a competitive fashion, and were put to discussion after task completion.

Songs: The songs were played and presented by the researchers at first and then sung together with the students twice. All the students participated in singing the songs. The aim of employing the songs was to both teach and practice the vocabulary items and grammatical structures already taught. The distinguishing factor between the two groups was the absence of songs in the control group. For the experimental group, each song was played 3 times, based on the three steps of presentation, practice, and production. The first time, the students only listened to the song. The second time, they were given the lyrics, available in their books. They did the actions and pointed to the pictures according to the content of each song and finally sang the song when they felt ready enough.

Stories: The stories employed in the study were aligned with the concepts found in the book. Some essential vocabularies were taught to the students prior to telling the stories. During the first presentation, students were quiet. For the second presentation, they participated by producing vocabulary items or the related sentences to which the researchers were pointing. In the third presentation, they willingly participated by retelling the story as much as they could remember. The aim of the three presentations was to involve the students in the story in order to help them recognize and produce the vocabulary items, grammatical structures and the theme of the story in the context. Then, they were asked to do a number of post-story tasks such as answering some comprehension questions in the form of true/false items, matching items, etc. in groups of three or four. The researchers reviewed the story the following session and asked the students some questions to recycle the grammatical structures and vocabulary items covered in the preceding session.

Finally, the post-test and the post-treatment interview were administered in the final session.

3.4 Data Analysis

To carry out the statistical analyses, SPSS 16 was used. After the required data were collected, the appropriate statistical methods were used as follows:

1. Independent samples t-tests were run to find out the effectiveness of the treatment between the experimental and the control group in terms of the oral and the written test. The same analysis was done to ensure the homogeneity of the learners before the treatment.
2. A paired samples t-test was also employed to find out the within-group differences after the treatment.

4. Results and Discussion

What follows presents the results and discusses the findings obtained from the analyses of data based on the research questions mentioned before.

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Measuring the learners' achievement and speaking ability before treatment

As stated earlier, in order to begin the study, the researchers administered a pre-test and an interview to make sure that there was not any significant difference between the two groups before the treatment. The descriptive statistics of the pre-test appears in the following table.

Table 1.*Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-Test*

| | Class | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Mean difference |
|-------------------------|--------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Pre-test of achievement | Experimental | 30 | 66.5000 | 11.30 | 2.92 |
| | Control | 35 | 63.5758 | 10.04064 | |

As shown in the above table, the mean of the students in the experimental group is 66.5, whereas that of the control group is 63.5. To see if the mean difference (2.9) between the two groups is significant, an independent samples t-test was run.

Table 2.*Independent Samples T-Test of the Pre-Test*

| | | F | T | Df | Sig.(2tailed) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Pre-test of achievement | Equal variances assumed | .357 | 1.088 | 61 | .281 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | 1.076 | 58.333 | .284 |

The results from Table 2 reveal that the mean difference between the experimental and control groups is not significant (0.2). Therefore, the two groups did not differ significantly in their performance in the pre-test.

The second test, namely, the one which tapped the speaking ability of the participants through interview was also conducted. The following table presents the descriptive statistics of the test.

Table 3.*Descriptive statistics (pre-treatment interview)*

| | Class | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Mean Difference |
|---------------|--------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pre-interview | Experimental | 30 | 45.0000 | 7.42781 | 1.35613 | .15152 |
| | Control | 35 | 44.8485 | 5.92727 | 1.03181 | |

As seen in the above table, there is a slight difference in the mean score of the experimental and control groups (0.15) in their pre-treatment interview. To find whether this difference is statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was run, the result of which is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4.*Independent Samples T-Test (Pre-Treatment Interview)*

| | | F | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|--------|-----------------|
| Pre-interview | Equal variances assumed | 1.275 | .090 | 61 | .929 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | .082 | 55.453 | .929 |

As shown in Table 4, the results obtained from the independent samples t-test indicate that the mean difference between the two groups is not significant (0.9), which reveals that the two groups did not differ significantly in their performance on the pre-treatment interview.

4.1.2. Measuring the learners' achievement and speaking ability after treatment

As mentioned before, the same tests were administered as the post-test of achievement and post-treatment interview to reach reliable and valid results. The results are illustrated in Tables 5 and 6 which show how much the learners in both groups had achieved and whether there was any difference between the experimental and control groups regarding their performance in post-test of achievement and post-treatment interview. The descriptive statistics of the post-test of achievement are summarized in the following table.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics (Post-Test of Achievement)

| | Class | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Mean Difference |
|--------------------------|--------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Post-test of achievement | Experimental | 30 | 90.3667 | 7.01468 | 9.33636 |
| | Control | 35 | 81.0303 | 5.54236 | |

As depicted in the above table, there is a mean difference of 9.3 between the two groups under study. In order to find whether the treatment given to the experimental group had caused any significant change in this group and to see if the students in the experimental group had achieved significantly higher scores on the post-test of achievement, another independent t-test was run. The results of this statistical analysis are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6.*Independent Samples T-Test (Post-Test of Achievement)*

| | | F | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-----------------|
| Post-test of achievement | Equal variances assumed | 1.820 | 5.888 | 61 | .000 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | 5.823 | 55.157 | .000 |

The above table indicates that the experimental group outperformed the control group and the difference is highly significant.

The descriptive statistics of the post-treatment interview are tabulated in the following Table.

Table 7.*Descriptive Statistics (post-treatment interview)*

| | Class | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Mean Difference |
|----------------|--------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| post-interview | Experimental | 30 | 83.5000 | 6.58499 | 20.92424 |
| | Control | 35 | 62.5758 | 6.74551 | |

As presented in the above table, there is a large difference in the performance of the experimental and control groups and to see if this difference was significant or not, another independent samples t-test was run.

Table 8.*Independent Samples T-Test (Post-Treatment Interview)*

| | | F | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----------------|-----------------------------|------|--------|--------|-----------------|
| Post-interview | Equal variances assumed | .713 | 12.436 | 61 | .000 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | 12.451 | 60.678 | .000 |

As indicated in the above table, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in the post-treatment interview.

4.1.3. Comparison of the experimental group's performance in post-test of achievement and post-treatment interview

In order to find out the area in which the experimental group developed better, the mean gains of learners in post-test of achievement and post-treatment interview were measured, as shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9. *Experimental group's Performance in Post-Test of Achievement and Post-Treatment Interview*

| | N | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------|----|-------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Test gain | 30 | 38.00 | 2.00 | 40.00 | 23.8667 | 9.63375 |
| Interview gain | 30 | 30.00 | 25.00 | 55.00 | 38.5000 | 8.21584 |

It can be concluded from the above table that the learners who were exposed to the treatment made a progress in both post-test of achievement and post-treatment interview, but the progress in post-treatment interview was much greater.

4.1.4. Experimental group's performance in different test components

As mentioned before, the test was comprised of three sections of listening, vocabulary/grammar, and writing. To find out the area in which the learners in the experimental group progressed more, a paired samples t-test was run to compare their performance in pre and post-test of achievement in each section of the test.

Table 10. *Paired Samples T-Test for Experimental Group's Listening Performance*

| | | Number of pairs | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | T | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|------------------------------|-----------------|---------|----------------|-----------------|--------|----|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | postlistening – prelistening | 30 | 3.20000 | 1.73006 | .31586 | 10.131 | 29 | .000 |

The results obtained from the paired-samples t-test, as shown in Table 10, reveal that the mean difference observed between the scores of the learners in experimental group (3.2) regarding their listening performance in pre and post-test of achievement is significant at .05 level of significance.

Similarly, according to Table 11, the mean difference between their performance in vocabulary and grammar (4.9) is statistically significant at .05level.

Table 11.*Paired Samples T-Test for Experimental Group's Performance in Vocabulary/Grammar*

| | | Number of pairs | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|---|-----------------|------|----------------|-----------------|------|----|-----------------|
| pair 1 | Postvocabulary grammar – prevocabularygrammar | 30 | 4.98 | 3.60 | .65 | 7.56 | 29 | .000 |

Moreover, table 12 indicates that the mean difference between the learners' writing performance in pre and post-test (3.6) is also statistically significant at .05 level of significance.

Table 12.*Paired Samples T-Test for Experimental Group's Writing Performance*

| | | Number of pairs | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | T | f | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|----------------------------|-----------------|------|----------------|-----------------|--------|---|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | Post-writing – Pre-writing | 30 | 3.65 | 1.56 | .28 | 12.815 | 9 | .000 |

Therefore, it can be concluded from the three tables above that the learners in the experimental group did best firstly in the vocabulary and grammar section of the test (4.9), secondly in the writing section (3.6), and finally in the listening section (3.2).

4.2. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of using pedagogical tools, namely games, songs, and stories on the achievement of young EFL language learners. With regard to the results obtained from the analysis of data, one can conclude that the treatment given to the experimental group caused the learners to

outperform the control group and the pedagogical tools used in the study had a great influence on young learners' achievement. As mentioned before, the participants were evaluated regarding their speaking, listening and writing skills, as well as their performance in vocabulary and grammar based on the content of their course book through which they were taught. They reached the highest scores in speaking, then in vocabulary/grammar, then in writing, and finally in listening. In the following section the results obtained from the analysis of data are discussed based on the related review of literature.

To answer the research questions of the present study, the mean difference between the experimental and control groups was measured to see if there is any difference between the two groups regarding their performance in the post-test of achievement and post-treatment interview. As it can be seen from the results, the mean differences for both the post-test of achievement and post-treatment interview were significant. Therefore, it can be inferred that there is a difference between the experimental and control groups after treatment and students reached higher scores in the interview than the post-test of achievement which included items on listening, vocabulary/grammar, and writing. The following section provides the findings of several studies all supporting the results obtained from the present study.

Regarding the effects of games on learners' vocabulary knowledge, the results of the present study are in line with the studies undertaken by Tavi and Isigag (2009), Ajibade and Ndububa (2008), Yip and Kwan (2006), and Cekaite and Aronsson (2005). Tavi and Isigag (2009) focused on teaching language to very young learners through the implementation of games. They consider communication as the ultimate goal of language learning which is made easier through the use of words which are remembered, retained and meaningfully used due to the employment of games. Ajibade and Ndububa (2008) showed the link between using games, songs, and stories and language learners' motivation and language performance. Yip and Kwan (2006) stated that learners learning through games tend to learn more and better, retain words for a longer period, and retrieve more words. Cekaite and Aronsson (2005) found that language games, played and used collaboratively by the learners, would expand the learners'

vocabulary knowledge and at the same time provide situations for authentic language use. The results of the study are also in line with the ideas proposed by Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984) and Malouf (1988, cited in Mongillo, 2006) who believe that instructional games would facilitate learning and help language learners improve different skills. Moreover, Rustick (2007), using grammar gaming to practice the already learnt concepts, believes that games would affect learners' writing skill.

With regard to the effects of songs on language learners' skills development, the results support the findings obtained by Yuliana (2003) who highlighted the influence of using songs on learners' speaking, listening, and writing skills claiming that these activities are not only fun, but also skills developing. Nussel and Cicogna (1991) also stated that using songs in language classrooms would influence learners' speaking, reading, and writing skills. Considering the influence of songs on vocabulary and/or grammar, the results are in line with the studies conducted by Tavit and Isigag (2009), and the ideas proposed by Clarke (2007), Ayotte (2004), Booth (2001), Kramer (2001), Lowe (1998), Cranmer and Laroy (1992), and Nussel and Cicogna (1991). Tavit and Isigag (2009) differentiated learners' achievement through the use of songs for one group and games for another group. Comparing the results obtained from the data analysis, the researchers found that teaching vocabulary to young learners through games would be more effective than songs. Clarke (2007) and Booth (2001) have emphasized the effectiveness of repetition in songs leading to better learning and reinforcement of learnt vocabulary. Ayotte (2004) has emphasized the effects of using songs on grammar acquisition believing that songs are beneficial in language classrooms as they provide learners with a non-threatening learning environment. Kramer (2001) and Nussel and Cicogna (1991) have stressed the importance of comprehensible input found in songs which leads to learners' better understanding of vocabulary and grammar. Lowe (1998) has concluded that the use of songs in language classrooms would lead to learners' better performance in vocabulary, grammar, and rhythmic patterns. Finally, Cranmer and Laroy (1992) have suggested the use of music and songs in language classrooms to lead students to use language by providing some activities in which

learners listen to a song and respond with specific grammatical structures.

With respect to the influences of stories on language learners' skills development and vocabulary development, the results obtained from the present study are in line with the works done by Viggiano (2003) and Tavil and Soylemez (2008), respectively. Viggiano (2003) has emphasized the importance of using stories in language classrooms as an effective tool to build learners' literacy improving their speaking, writing, and drawing skills. Tavil and Soylemez (2008) have conducted a study on the effectiveness of story-telling to very young learners concluding that at the completion of the study, all the participants had learned the new vocabulary at recognition level and some were even able to produce the words.

5. Conclusions

The present study aimed to find out whether or not games, songs, and stories can facilitate language learners' achievement. The pre-treatment interview and pre-test of achievement were followed by the post-treatment interview and post-test of achievement after the treatment to see the effectiveness of the experiment on language learners' achievement. The results revealed significant differences between the learners of the two groups on the post-test and post-treatment interview. In fact, students in the experimental group scored higher in all test components, including speaking, writing, and listening skills and vocabulary/grammar knowledge. It was also concluded that the pedagogical tools used in the study affected learners' speaking achievement the most, then their vocabulary/grammar knowledge, then their writing skills, and finally their listening skill.

Considering the results of the study, a few implications, with regard to EFL teachers and institutes can be offered.

Since the experimental group under study, being exposed to these pedagogical tools, outperformed the control group, the results drawn from the study can provide teachers with helpful information on the effectiveness of employing these activities in language

classrooms. It seems essential for language teachers to take care in selecting level-appropriate games, songs, and stories and to be aware of the fact that the use of such activities may affect learners' achievement and help them improve their language skills and command of language. Moreover, if teachers believe in the value of instructional tools, such as games, songs and stories, this should be reflected in their classroom practice. Following teachers, students will grow positive attitudes toward the activities and consider them as vital parts of their learning experience. Teachers should also develop a sort of reorientation and take a childlike attitude to get involved in the activities and encourage learners to take part in them.

Regarding implications for language teaching institutes, in order to survive in today's business world and considering the rat-race competition existing among different language institutes, such institutes are recommended to develop new methods of teaching by making use of pedagogical tools which are engaging and enjoyable. One way to accomplish this is to incorporate these activities into the educational curriculums used in language institutes. Such practices may contribute to the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning languages. It can also clarify the effectiveness of using instructional tools in teaching for prospective teachers in teacher training programs. Prospective teachers should be made aware of the fact that teaching through these tools may lead to learners' better learning and achievement. Being aware of the importance of employing these tools, language institutes should provide the necessary facilities so that teachers can make use of the tools and activities.

References

- Ajibade, Y. & Ndububa, K. (2008). Effects of word games, culturally relevant songs, and stories on students' motivation in a Nigerian English language class. *TESL Canada Journal*, 25(2), 27-48.
- Ayotte, S. B. M. (2004). *The acquisition of verb forms through songs* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, Michigan).
- Booth, C. E. (2001). Building Language Through Songs. *Early Childhood Today*, 15(4), 23-37.
- Bruner, J. (1983). *Child's Talk: Learning to Use Language*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Casla, M., Poveda, D., Rujas, I., Cuevas, I. (2008). Literary voices in interaction in urban storytelling events for children. *Linguistics and Education*, 19, 37-55.
- Cekaite, A. & Aronsson, K. (2005). Language Play, a Collaborative Resource in Children's L2 learning. *Applied Linguistics* 26(2), 169-191.
- Clarke, R. E. (2007). Learning from serious games? Arguments, evidence, and research suggestions. *Educational Technology*, May-June 2007, 56-59.
- Cranmer, D., & Laroy, C. (1992). *Musical openings*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- Farhady, H., Jafarpur, A., & Birjandi, P. (1994). *Language skills testing: From theory to practice*. Tehran: SAMT Publications.
- Fisher, D. (2001). Early language learning with and without music. *Reading Horizons*, 42(1), 39-49.
- Fonseca Mora, C. (2000). Foreign language acquisition and melody singing. *ELT Journal*, 54(2), 146-152.
- Freshwater, A., Sherwood, E., Mbugua, E. (2008). Music and Physical Play. *Childhood Education*, 85(1), 2-5.
- Fromberg, D. P. (2002). *Play and meaning in early childhood education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kolb, G. R. (1996). Read with a beat: Developing literacy through music and song. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(1), 76-77.

- Kramer, D. (2001). A blueprint for teaching foreign languages and cultures through music in the classroom and on the web.*ADFL Bulletin*, 33(1), 29-34.
- Lowe, R. K. (1998). Extracting information from an animation during complex visual learning.*European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 14(2), 225-244.
- Mongillo, G. (2006). *Instructional games: Scientific language use, concept understanding, and attitudinal development of middle school learners* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Forham University, New York).
- Murphey, T. (1990). The Song stuck in my head phenomenon: a melodic Din in the LAD? *System*, 18(1), 53-64.
- Nuessel, F. & Cicogna, C. (1991). The integration of songs and music into the Italian curriculum.*Italica*, 68(4), 473-86.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants.*MCBUniversity Press*, 9(5), 1-6.
- Rixon, S. 2000. Young Learners of English: Background and Issues. *Modern English Teacher*, 9 (4), 5-10.
- Rustick, M. T. (2007). Grammar Games in the Age of Anti-Remediation.*Journal of Basic Writing*, 26(1), 43-62.
- Speaker, K., Taylor, D., & Kamen, R. (2004). Storytelling: Enhancing language acquisition in young children. *Education*, 125(1), 3-13.
- Tavil, Z. M. & Isigag, K. U. (2009). Teaching vocabulary to very young learners through games and songs.*EKEV AKADEMİ DERGİSİ*, 13(38), 299-308.
- Tavil, Z. M., & Soylemez, A. S. (2008). Vocabulary teaching through storytelling to very young learners in kindergartens.*EKEV AKADEMİ DERGİSİ*: 12(35), 371-382.
- Viggiano, R. (2003). Cultural integration through storytelling in art and language: an action research project with junior high Latino immigrant students (Ph.D dissertation, Columbia University).
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Wright, A., Betteridge, D., & Buckby, M. (2005). *Games for language learning*. 3rd edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Yip, F. & Kwan, A. (2006). Online vocabulary games as a tool for teaching and learning English vocabulary. *Educational Media International*, 43(3), 233–249.
- Yuliana, Y. (2003). Teaching English to Young Learners through Songs retrieved from <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?RQT=318&pmid=69723&TS=1242544251&clientId=46449&VInst=PROD&VName=PQD&VType=PQD> (28.10.2009).