The Effect of Using the Instructional games on Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Achievement and Their Retention

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to compare the impact of learning vocabulary items through instructional games vs. traditional method on vocabulary improvement and retention in Iranian EFL students. The subjects were assigned to two homogeneous groups. The control group received (traditional method) and the experimental group was exposed to games (playing on words) as a treatment. Before starting the treatment 3 equal standard tests of 40 multiple-choice items of vocabulary were prepared as pretest, posttest and delayed posttest. In the first session the pretest was administered to determine if there were any significant differences between the two groups. It was revealed that the two groups were homogeneous. After the end of the treatment, the subjects of both groups took the post test and after two weeks they took the delayed posttest. The results of the paired t-test showed that the participants in both groups performed better after both types of instruction. In order to compare the effectiveness of the two approaches an independents samples t-test was conducted. The results of the t-test showed that, although the performance of the students in both groups increased after the instruction, the instructional games approach was more successful in long term vocabulary retention that the traditional approach.

Key terms: Vocabulary, Instructional games, Traditional method, and Retention.

1.1. Introduction

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One of the things that specialists consider is the learning ample vocabulary or lexical competence. There is now general agreement among vocabulary specialists that lexical competence is at the very heart of communicative competence, the ability to communicate successfully and appropriately (Coady and Huckin 1997).

Vocabulary plays an essential role in communication than the other components of language. Obviously, the lack of vocabulary used in routine conversation and communication is the most common source and origin of students' incapacity to express what they want to say and write during their communication activities. It is supposed that introducing relevant vocabulary is prior to any other communication activity. Vocabulary or lexical item, as Chastain (1988) holds, plays a more important role than the other components of language. Without it, language would no longer exist.

According to the researchers a graduated students used 5000 to 7000 words in everyday speech but we should remember the purpose of learning language is to communicate appropriately in a real context with respect to this point of view we need those of words that we communicate appropriately. There is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is amusement and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a vocabulary as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. Laufer (1997) believes that vocabulary learning is at the heart of language learning and language use. If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire' (Nedomova`, 2007). Celce Murcia (1991) introduces three stages in teaching planned vocabulary: conveying meaning (stage one), checking for comprehension (stage two), consolidation (stage three). Yet, learning new vocabulary is one thing and being able to access it quickly when it is required for use is another.

Rivers (1981) has recommended some different points which the students need to acquire in order to learn vocabulary. These points are summarized as follows:

1- To commit vocabulary to long-term memory.
2- To discriminate variations in distribution and new boundary of meaning.

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3- To detect morpheme which recur in number of words.

4- To penetrate disguises that cognate or borrowed words have adopted in becoming assimilated within another language.

5- To discover new words for themselves.

6- To know the elastic quality of vocabulary.

According to Payne Hatch and Brown (1995), vocabulary learning necessitates the following procedure: Having sources for encountering new words, Acquiring the word form, Getting the word meaning, Consolidating the word form and meaning, Using the word.

Brown and Perry (1991) have confirmed that integrative strategies have a positive effect on retention because words are stored in association networks. Sungurtekin, Sezer, Bağçeli-Kahraman and Sadioğlu (2009: p. 756) explain that "by playing games, a child makes acquaintance with his environment, learns life and gains new instructions." Ministry of National Education's English Language Curriculum for Primary Education Grades 4,5,6,7 and 8 (2006) further claims that games should be a fundamental part of primary school education because they are motivating, contextualizing, and natural activities that make learning meaningful.

Stoffer (1995), vocabulary-learning strategies clustered onto nine groups:

1- Strategies involving authentic language use,

2- Strategies involving creative activities,

3- Strategies used for self-motivation,

4- Strategies used to create mental linkages,

5- Memory strategies

6- Visual/auditory strategies

7- Strategies involving physical action

8- Strategies used to overcome anxiety, and

9- Strategies used to organized words.

Stainberg (1983) claimed that "playing games takes the drudgery out of learning and this provides motivation". Hossein Vossoughi and Elizebeth Clair (1994) said that "Psychologically

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speaking, games can remove those affective filters from the learner's mind and provide them with a practical motivation and instant need to utilize linguistic items".

Advantages of Games

Here are some of the various advantages of the games that make them pedagogically valuable for the language classes.

Lexical meaning of the games, The concentration effect, Establishment of an atmosphere of cooperation and intimacy, Improvement of learning abilities ,Aiming at different skills, Maintenance of attention span, Providing motivation, Review and reinforcement of the materials, Rapid rectification of errors, Lowering the affective filter, Getting feedback, Improving self-esteem.

To sum up, games have a great pedagogical value providing language teachers with many advantages when they are used in foreign language classes. The review of the studies related to language games indicates that games are crucially important in foreign language teaching and learning in a variety of areas. Vossoughi (1994), also, believes that language games can be played at any time during the class period and for any educational purpose. Miller (1992) also enumerates some reasons for using games: first, it provides relaxation for classroom and shows the students' attention. Second, it increases the rate of learning and raises' students' concentration. Third, it identified students' problem.

Hypotheses for the Study

The present research is intended to find out whether there are any differences between the performance of the group which received a traditional approach and the one which received instructional games in vocabulary achievement and retention. Therefore the following hypotheses are formulated in the present study:

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H1: It will be effective if we established the instructional games in a good manner and help our teenagers to learn by heart the words it means they learn vocabulary in context as easy as possible.

H2: Evidences show that instructional games remove stress and create meaningful context so in this regard it improve students' retrieval or retention.

1.1. Methodology

1.2.1. Subjects

All the subjects participated in this study were the pre-intermediate students of private Ayandeh Sazan high school in Tehran. The numbers of subject were 60, all of whom were selected randomly and equally divided into two groups. One group was exposed to the traditional method of vocabulary teaching and the other group was exposed to instructional games. All of the subjects were male and between 13 to 19 years old. The teaching of the vocabularies in either the traditional class (control group) or the instructional games class (experimental group) was carried out by the researcher himself. Since the participants were thought to be of the same level of proficiency, namely pre intermediate, a test of proficiency was not administered to them.

1.2.2. Materials

The current study employed the following instruments:

1-**A General Questionnaire**: To get the general information about participants.

2- **Pre-test vocabulary**: It will be set to question around forty and then I will choose those of words that both groups could not answer and it should be around 15 to 20 words and to teach to both groups.

3-**Post-test vocabulary**: It shows the effect of the treatments and the differences between two groups.

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4-**Delayed Post-test**: Two weeks after post-test a test just the same as pretests and posttest administered to both groups as a delayed posttest in order to measure the subjects' long term retention. To this end, subjects of both groups took the delayed post tests unexpectedly.

1.2.3. Procedure

Two groups of students participated in the present study. One group of students consisting of 30 participants was selected randomly in order to investigate the effects of traditional teaching methods on vocabulary learning. Another group of students comprising 30 participants was chosen to see the influence of instructional games on the vocabulary learning and retention.

In both the groups, a vocabulary test which was adopted from Abadi Khah (1998) under heading of "the Effect of Language Game on Vocabulary Improvement" was selected. The students in both groups were asked to answer the questions in this test. After this stage, the students in the traditional class (control group) were taught new vocabularies by means of more traditional approaches like translation into and out of the target language, vocabulary memorization, pattern practice, keep notebook of new words, read, read, read, and the other rote learning activities. The students in the instructional games group (experimental group), however, were taught the new vocabularies by instructional games. It is to be mentioned that the researcher used instructional games to reinforce and fix what had already been taught. All the subjects were asked to take part in this task.

At the end of the term, the students were required to take a posttest which assessed their vocabulary knowledge via the same test used in the pretest. Two weeks later a test just the same as pretests and posttest administered to both groups as a delayed posttest in order to measure the subjects' long term retention.

2. Results and Discussion

In order to investigate the effect of two approaches to the teaching of vocabulary, namely the traditional approach and the instructional games approach, the following statistical procedures have been carried out. First, a paired samples t-test was carried out for the

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instructional games (experimental group). Table 4.1.Shows the differences in the vocabulary learning of participants before and after the teaching method.

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Conditions in the Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	13.6667	30	4.04572	.73864
	Posttest	22.6667	30	5.04007	.92019

Where is 4.2 Table?

Table 4.3. Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Delayed Posttest Conditions in the experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	13.6667	30	4.04572	.73864
	Delayed posttest	20.3333	30	5.20168	.94969

The descriptive data in Table 4.3 shows that the delayed posttest condition has a higher mean of vocabulary learning than the pretest condition. The correlation coefficient between these two conditions turned out to be 0.71 which indicates a very high value.

Where is 4.4 Table?

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Table4. 5. Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Posttest Conditions in the Traditional (control)Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	14.4667	30	4.98088	.90938
	Posttest	22.1333	30	5.19106	.94775

As highlighted in Table 4.5, the students in the posttest condition outperformed the students in the pretest condition in vocabulary learning. The correlation coefficient for the paired samples t-test of these two conditions turned out to be 0.85 which signifies a very high value.

To investigate the effect of traditional teaching in the long term learning of vocabularies, the following statistical procedures have been carried out.

Where is 4.6 Table?

Table **4. 7.** Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Delayed Posttest Conditions in the Traditional (control)Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	14.4667	30	4.98088	.90938
	Delayed posttest	17.6000	30	4.45359	.81311

The results of the descriptive statistics clearly indicate a decline in the use of vocabularies in the delayed posttest condition.

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In order to compare the performance of the two groups with each other, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results are shown in tables 4.9 and 4.10 below.

Where is 4.8 Table?

Table 4.9. Descriptive Statistics for Delayed Posttest Results in the Control(traditional) and Experimental (innovative) Groups

	Two methods	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Delayed posttest	Traditional	30	17.6000	4.45359	.81311
	Games group	30	20.3333	5.20168	.94969

As the mean scores of the two approaches show, the experimental group has a higher value compared to that of the control group. To see the exact differences, the t-test is reported below in table 4.10.

Table4. 10. Independent Samples Test Results for Delayed Posttest Results in the Traditional(control) and instructional games (experimental) Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Delayed posttest	Equal variances assumed	.549	.462	-2.186	58	.033	-2.73333	1.25023	-5.23593	-.23073
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.186	5.666	.033	-2.73333	1.25023	-5.23720	-.22947

As the results of the t-test shows, although the performance of the students in both groups increased after the instruction, the innovative or experimental group was more successful in long term vocabulary retention than the traditional (control group).

Please check the figure numbers.

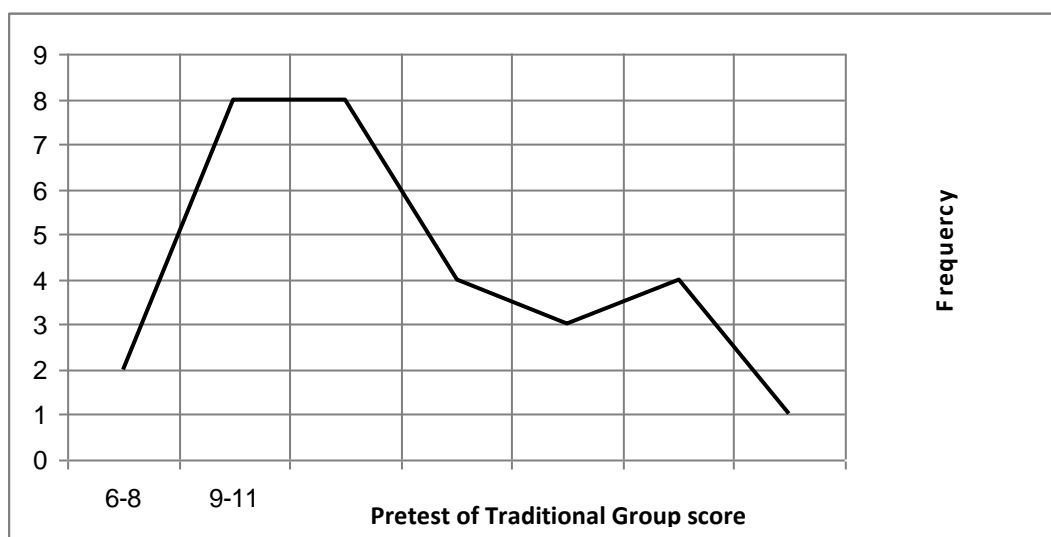Figure (4-16)$_{b_1}$1 shows score group and frequency of pretest of traditional group.

Pretest of Traditional Group score

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Figure (4-16)$_{b1}$ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Traditional Group in Pretest.

Figure (4-16)$_{b2}$ shows score group and frequency of posttest of traditional group.
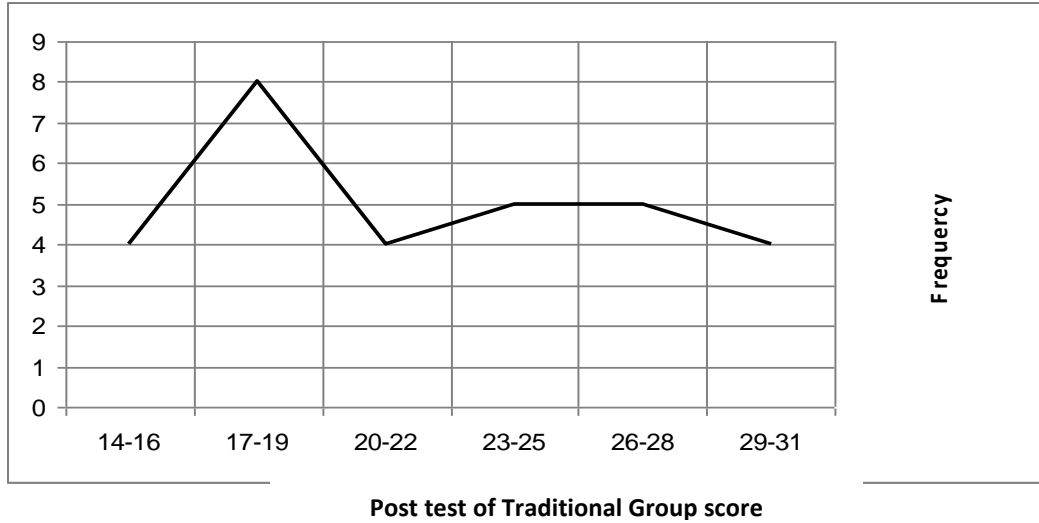

Post test of Traditional Group score

Figure (4-16)$_{b2}$ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Traditional Group in the Posttest.

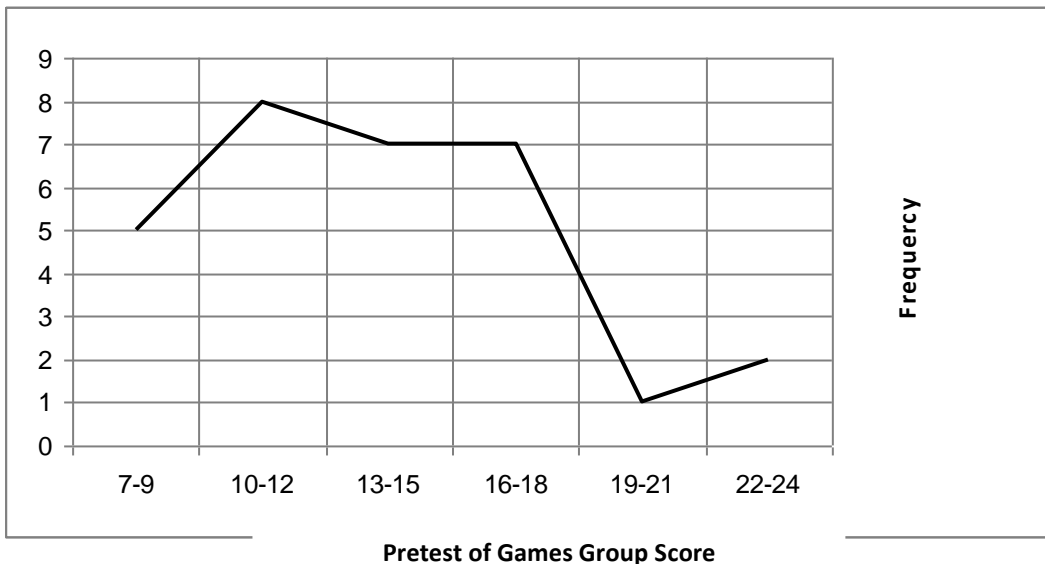Figure (4-16)$_{b3}$ shows score group and frequency of pretest of games group.

Pretest of Games Group Score

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Figure (4-16)$_{b3}$ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Games Group in Pretest.

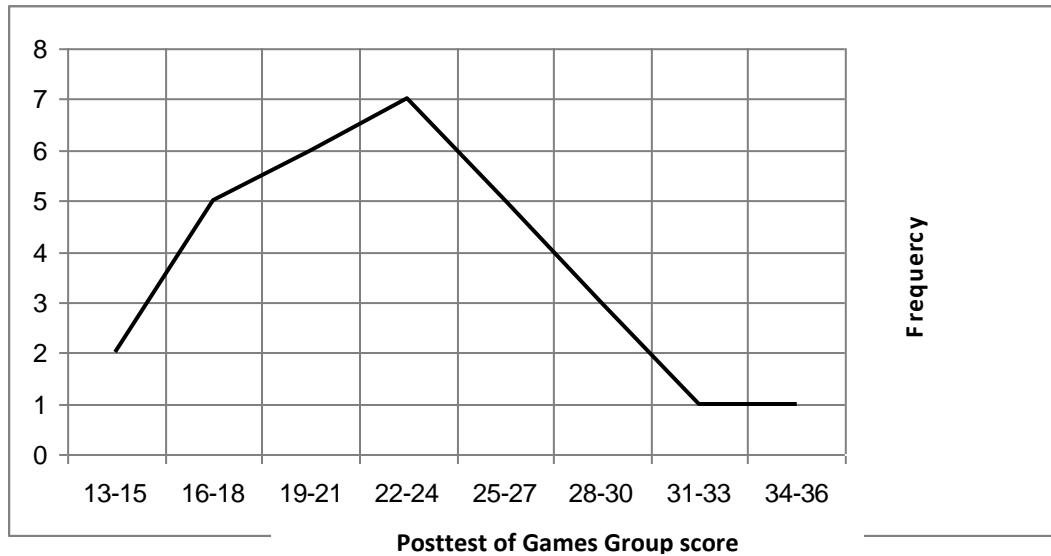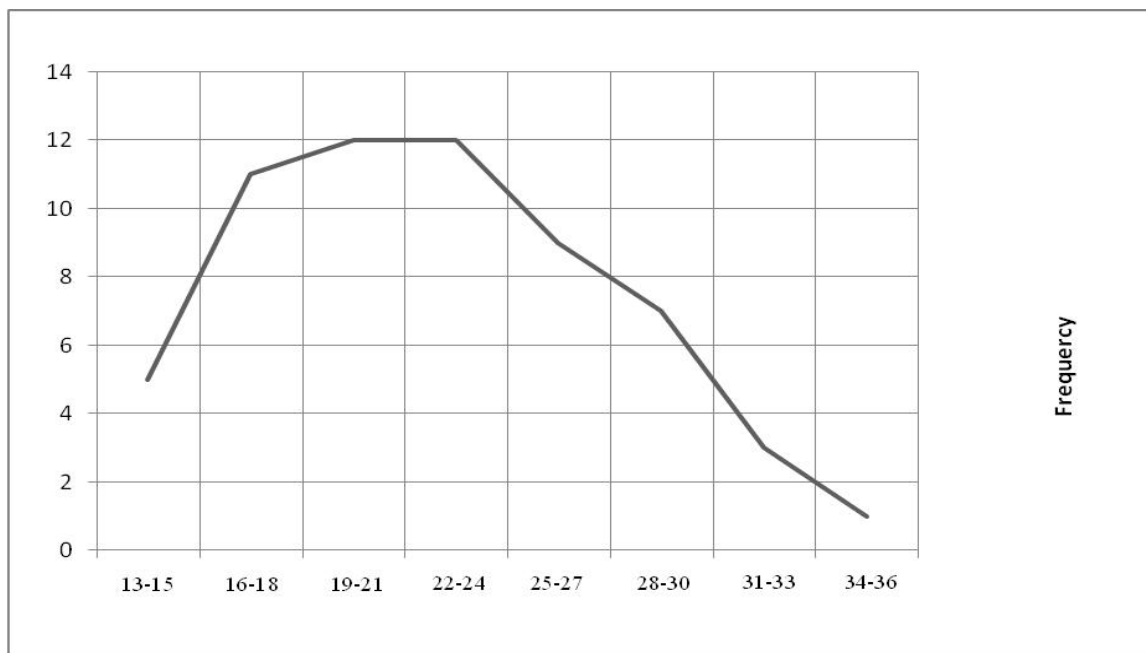Figure (4-16)$_{b4}$ shows score group and frequency of posttest of games group.

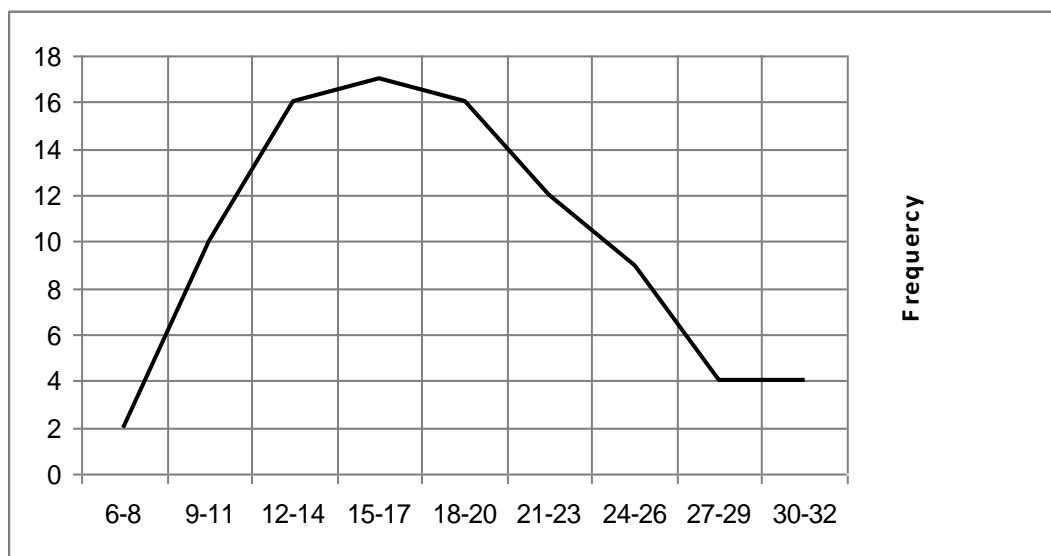*Figure (4-16)$_{b4}$ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Games Group in Posttest.*

Figure (4-16)$_{a2}$ shows score Groups and Frequencies of the two groups in the post test.

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Posttest of Games and Traditional group

Figure (4-16)$_{a2}$ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Games and Traditional group in Post test.
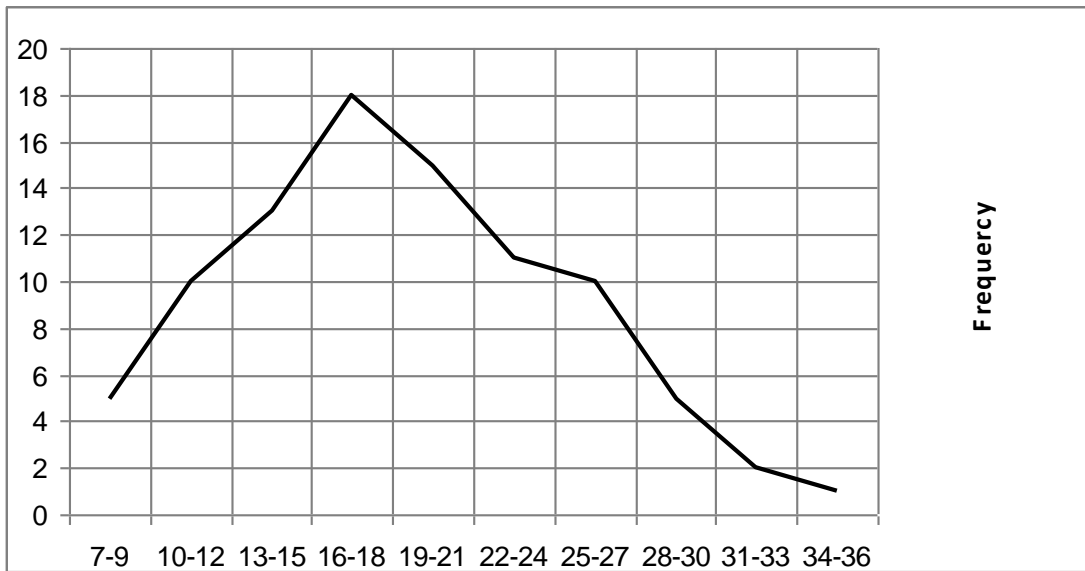
Figure (4-23)$_a$ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Traditional Group in Pretest, Posttest and Delayed Posttests.

Pretest, Posttest, Delayed Posttest scores of Control group

Figure (4-23)$_a$ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Traditional Group in Pretest, Posttest and Delayed Posttests.

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Figure (4-23)ₐ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Games Group in Pretest, Posttest and Delayed Posttests.

Pretest, Posttest and Delayed Posttest scores of Games Group

Figure (4-23)ₐ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Games Group in Pretest, Posttest and Delayed Posttests.

Figure (4-24)ₐ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Games and Traditional group in Pretest, posttest and delayed posttest.
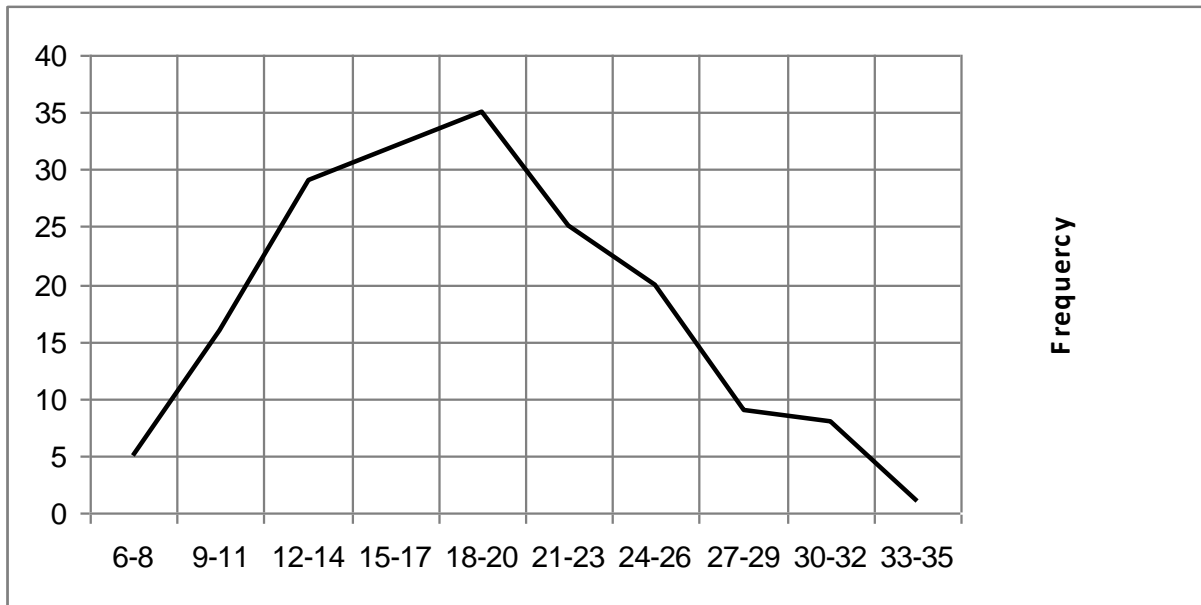

F igure (4-24)ₐ A Frequency Polygon of Scores of Games and Traditional group in Pretest,

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posttest and delayed posttest. According to table above the scores distributed normally around the mean (18.47)

3. Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of teaching vocabulary items through instructional games. Based on the statistical analyses of the previous chapter, one can argue that there was a significant difference between the two traditional and innovative teaching methods. Although learners in both groups enhanced their performance after being taught in either one of the classes with either one of the approaches, the instructional games approach proved better than the traditional approach.

Although the findings may seem controversial given that most scholars in TEFL believe that traditional approaches are no longer effective compared with more innovative and learner-centered ones, one should consider that there are many factors to be taken into account in the success or failure of these approaches. Therefore, there may be several facts which impact the results of the study.

Given that participants of the present study were successful in instructional games approaches to vocabulary instruction, one might conclude that it is best for the teachers to adopt and use these approaches in the classrooms. They need to integrate different techniques according to their learners' needs and wants. It should be taken into account that in foreign language learning contexts (FLL) such as Iran where learners do not have sufficient amount of contact with the native speakers of a target language, both traditional and innovative approaches seem to be adequate and appropriate. In order to acquire language, students must engage in activities that will allow for multiple exposures in a format that emphasize their strengths.

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The implication of these aspects in teaching is that the goal of vocabulary teaching must be more than simply covering a certain number of words on a word list. We must use teaching techniques that can help students internalize the new words in better ways. And with regard to the findings of the present study, the integration of both the traditional and innovative (instructional games) approaches can be effective.

In addition to classroom techniques that teachers use, there should be extra instruction for the students to become independent learners. Discovery learning that this approach advocates leads learners to be involved in semantic processing that helps learning and retention.

Given the importance to instructional games in increasing the success of students in vocabulary learning and long term retention, teachers can adopt a variety of activities. Educational games are a great way to tap into student motivation and increase learning. It is possible to use games as reinforcing devices for teaching vocabulary in order to transfer learned items from short term memory to long term memory.

Innovative approaches to vocabulary teaching including instructional games are also useful from a different point of view. These activities can enhance the learning of vocabularies by means of decreasing the affective filter in learning and creating a more positive and relaxed attitude in the learners. Thus, innovative approaches support the principles of humanistic approaches and advocate the concept of a 'whole person'. In other words, there should be attention on the part of the teachers not only to the enhancement of the cognitive factors in the learners but also their affective factors.

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The teachers can use the old techniques of teaching vocabulary with instructional games. The teacher can present the new material first in the traditional deductive or inductive ways and then encourage the students to use the learned structures in freer and less controlled ways.

Teachers can also use games in addition to traditional approaches because games can help learners engage in classroom interactions that might lead students to focus on the form of the materials. Interactions provide meaningful input that foster syntactic processing. Learners can be also pushed to produce language, or what Swain (2000) calls pushed output. According to the above discussion, using games may be an efficient approach to achieve educational objectives, a focus on both the meaning and the form.

Barcroft (2009) has examined the relationship between learner-selected strategies and intentional vocabulary learning in Spanish learners of English. Barcroft (2009) suggested that the instructors need to get information about the types of strategies learners need to use. According to Barcroft, the instructors need to raise the learners' awareness about strategy use by informing them about findings of this nature that might help them reconsider the strategies that they employ and try new strategies that may be more effective.

Another important thing that the teachers should pay attention is the choice of the right task for vocabulary learning. Students should be given opportunities to use the language they are learning in realistic contexts. Learners can use the learned vocabularies in each of the four language skills.

Instructional games will work better and bring about more effective results and outcomes in the case of using more realistic and authentic material. These can be used to expose the students

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to rich, contextualised, and naturally-occurring language. The authentic texts and situations in the classroom that are similar to the situations in the outside world can be interesting to the learners. Learners would be motivated to see that the classroom meets their real-life needs. Also, the use of authentic materials will improve the communicative competence of the learners. Given these benefits associated with the use of more innovative approaches in the classroom, teachers can present the material and assure that their learners understand the vocabularies and then engage them in more authentic activities.

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