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## Improvisation with the Lexical Approach

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### Abstract

In this research, our main purpose is to attempt to promote the speaking strategies of prep students focusing basically on lexical chunks, personalizing communicative competence and amusing feature motivation by 'improvisation'. Teaching vocabulary within a contextualized situation is highly influential compared to current approaches, and integrating post-speaking activities with an acting is opted for more frequently, as learners are required to use implicitly acquired structures in another productive skill, with the philosophy 'language as a means'. This study was conducted to look into the effects of improvisation on the speaking strategies and lexical competence of preparatory students in School of foreign languages at Istanbul Şehir University. It was designed as a both qualitative and quantitative method. The data was collected through the content analysis by means of rubrics. With the help of those instruments, the effectiveness of improvisation so as to promote speaking strategies and lexical competence of students in pre-intermediate level was tested. The other aim of the study is to find out if students' vocabulary knowledge could be improved through improvisation and the last aim is to find out students' attitudes towards improvisation in terms of lexical items. In the light of the data analysis, the result and the analysis of the vocabulary and speaking rubrics revealed that participants succeeded in promoting their speaking strategies and lexical competence. Study result has revealed that students had positive impact toward vocabulary learning in the speaking process. Data results have also shown that, learners were actively participants.

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## 1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the speaking strategies and lexical competence of students who are learning English in various university departments and to help increase students' speaking competence by using communicative games like improvisation. Having observed the speaking difficulties of students, we plan to utilize those communicative games in EFL classes. We want to use improvisation as a tool to help students to increase their speaking skills with the help of Pre-Intermediate target words. We believe that speaking abilities and lexical competence could be best improved by personalizing the use of the language.

In this study, we aim to promote the speaking strategies of students by using the communicative games like improvisation as an effective tool in the language classes.

## 2. Research questions:

This study aims to provide an answer for the following research questions;

1. Does improvisation help students promote their lexical competence?
2. What are the attitudes of students towards the use of improvisation in vocabulary learning in speaking classes?

## 3. Review of literature

### 3.1. Game-based teaching in ELT

As Grivaa, Semogloua, Geladaria (2010) cited in their article, there are various advantages that accompany utilizing amusements to help learners create and enhance in students speaking skills and competences. Initially, they connect with students in agreeable and group learning (Ersoz, 2000), they support students' communication (Lee, 1995), and give chances to genuine correspondence by overcoming any issues between the classroom and the true. Secondly, recreations are exceedingly propelling and help learners to make learning fun and enjoyable (Lee, 1995). Games make the lesson 'less repetitive', since they keep up learners' consideration and enthusiasm for the dialect without getting exhausted and maintain their exertion of learning (Lee, 1995).

As it is clearly stated above interacting through the games is more fun, challenging and competitive for most of the learners since it involves fun feature of the learning element. Students engaged in learning in a more focused way when compared to ordinary classroom context. Students are more likely to remember what they have learnt especially in terms of vocabulary, when they actively take part in the learning process.

Students mostly learn better through disclosure and experimentation and being roused to learn in an energetic and relaxed setting. Language learning can be connected with normal exercises, for example, play, since young learners' learning languages can occur as actually as they figure out how to run, bounce and play (Baker, 2000). Playing amusements is a powerful method for making a large portion of ideal conditions for language acquisitions (Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2009; Uberman, 1998). It can be concluded from the statement above that students learn best when they are actively participants, that is to say learning by doing is an effective phenomena in terms of learning.

### 3.2. Teaching vocabulary

Vocabulary Teaching has always attracted researchers' interest since it is one of the most important components of language learning and it is generally considered to be difficult to teach for the language teachers. It is a very well-known fact that vocabulary knowledge is closely related to reading. There is a strong relationship between these two. It is strongly believed by many researchers that, student's level of vocabulary knowledge has been appeared to be a critical indicator of reading capacity (fluency) and reading comprehension for English language learners (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola & Vaughn, 2004). Developing vocabulary advances reading appreciation as well as empowers learners to take part in the outside of the classroom (Camille, 2004).

Another important phenomenon worth mentioning is about extensive reading and unknown words. Most researchers appear to agree that, aside from the initial couple of thousand most basic words, vocabulary learning and

teaching transcendentally happens through extensive reading, with the learner speculating the importance of obscure words (Huckin, & Coady, 1999).

There has been many studies done about relying on vocabulary learning is to encourage satisfactory vocabulary learning, four vocabulary learning accomplices (students, teachers, materials writers, and researchers) need to add to the learning process. Vocabulary learning programs need to incorporate both an explicit, deliberate learning part and a component based around expanding exposure and incidental learning (Schmitt, 2008).

### *3.3. Explicit vocabulary teaching*

In spite of the fact that showing vocabulary in context has a lot of reasons, the genuine estimation of setting lies in the authenticity advantages of which are of three distinct sorts. As it is proposed by Monsell (1985), as a matter of first importance, surveying the significance of a word in connection obliges understudies to create techniques like anticipating and inferring, which turn out to be very advantageous as learning advances in light of the fact that they impart a disposition of confidence that is the particular element of capability. Besides, efficiently meeting new vocabulary things in setting emphasizes the way that the words are really utilized as a part of talk for purposes of communication. In conclusion, every one of the variables specified above can be said to add to a learner's L2 self-autonomy and to encourage the exchange of information that goes with it. In addition, they underline the way that the mental presentation of a word's importance enhances together with progressive experiences in diverse settings (Çiftçi, & Üster, 2009).

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1. Participants*

This study was conducted with 8 pre-intermediate students who study in pre-intermediate level of School of Foreign Languages. Participants were seven Turkish university students who study in Istanbul Şehir University where English is the medium of instruction. One of them is from North Iraq whose native language is Arabic and currently learning English. Their age varied from 18-22 and they all come from different educational backgrounds, ranging from private high schools to public high schools. They are supposed to learn English for a year in order to continue in their area of study. In that English course learners are required to follow a schedule in School of Languages for a year in order to take the STEP Proficiency Test.

All the participants in the current study acquired English during childhood both in their family and school settings and their native language is Turkish except the Iraqi student.

### *4.2. Data collection instruments*

To obtain a reliable result, we planned to use vocabulary and speaking rubrics. Data collection procedure lasted four weeks. As for warm-up stage, teacher enlightens the students what is meant by 'Improvisation'. At the beginning of the lesson, teacher divides the class into two and chooses a student from each group. Then; teacher creates a context and gives a prompt to the each group member. (Speaking in class activities were used each week). This prompt may be related to the course book topics or any grammatical structures that is taught previously. In the while stage of the lesson teacher gives five lexical chunks to each student without showing them the chunks. Students take the papers and put them into their pocket without looking at them. When they start to improvise with the prompt teacher gave, teacher blows a whistle suddenly. Right at that moment student who is acting is supposed take a word from his/her pocket and use it immediately in a context without considering whether it is meaningful or not. Ultimately as the lexis is finished, the student using the most of the words correctly scores points for his/her group and next participants come to act. This improvisation process lasted for 4 weeks. First and the last week, vocabulary and speaking rubrics were implemented and the results are compared with one another.

### 4.3. Instruments

#### 4.3.1. Speaking assessment rubric

This rubric aims to measure the students' performance on the speaking in terms of four categories which are; vocabulary use, fluency, accuracy, organization of ideas and interaction. Total score for Speaking Assessment Analytic rubric is out of 20.

#### 4.3.2. Vocabulary rubric

Vocabulary Rubric is designed to score the vocabulary competence of the students. It consists of the following items:

- The student has a complete and detailed understanding of the term. The student creates explanations and descriptions of the term. The student can use the term in sentences.
- The student has a complete understanding of the term.
- The student does not completely understand the term.
- The student has so many misconceptions about the term.
- Not enough information to make a judgement.

Total score for the vocabulary quiz is 5.

### 4.4. Data analysis

The method chosen for conducting this study is both qualitative and quantitative. This study lasted for four weeks. Content analysis and Mean, Median methods employed to analyze the data by defining more examples in detail.

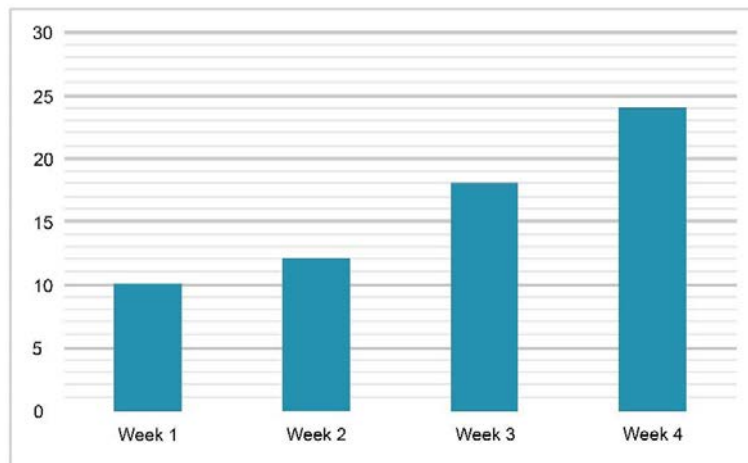


Figure 1: The number of the words used through weeks

Figure 1 indicates the number of lexis that students used through 4 weeks. As, it can be clearly seen from Table I the number of vocabulary that students were able to use in a correct form is progressively increased week by week. The reason behind this is closely related to usage of target words in a context with a meaningful way. Second reason might be related to frequency of the task that has been done in the class, learners became better at improvisation.

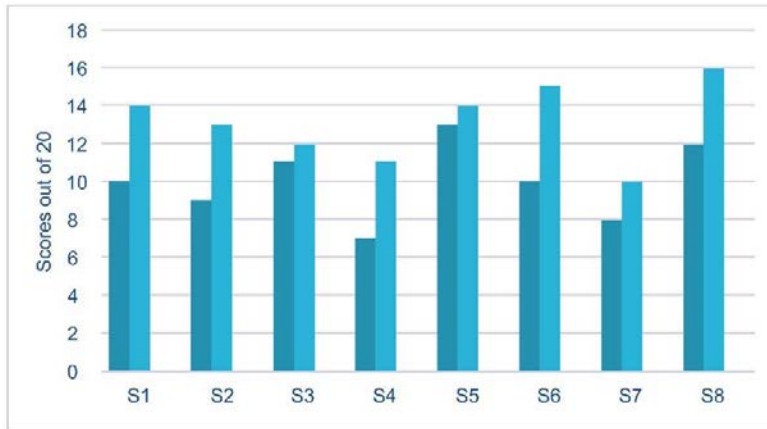


Figure 2: Speaking Assessment Rubric

Figure 2 indicates the scores of the students from Speaking Assessment Rubric in the first and fourth weeks. One can easily conclude from Table II that, students’ scores from Speaking Assessment Rubric were quite low in the first week which is indicated as dark blue. However when second bar is analyzed the progress that students made in terms of expressing themselves is pretty high when compared to first week. It should also be noted that, scores in the first and the fourth week is significantly differs in a positive correlation.

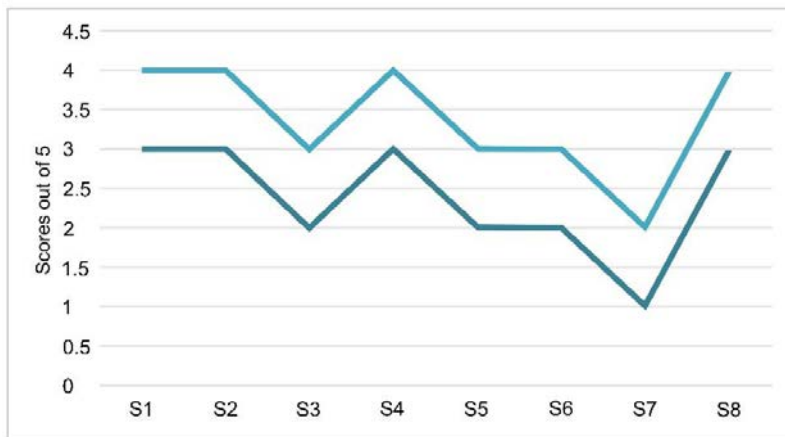


Figure 3 Vocabulary Rubric

Figure 3 indicates the scores of the students from Vocabulary Rubric both in the first and fourth week. Scores of the vocabulary rubric for the first and fourth week are shown obviously in Table III. As it is shown in the table, student’s performance at the first week is significantly low. However when the fourth week which is shown with the light blue bar, is analyzed, it can be perceived that, students made a progress in terms of lexical competence since their scores increased significantly.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

At the end of our study it was quite obvious that most of the pre intermediate students managed to participate with other group members in during the vocabulary acquisition process.

We strongly hold the opinion that this improvisation game had tremendous effect on pre intermediate students' development of communicative skills as well as their vocabulary competence. As it is known very well, students are more likely to forget what they learn in class in terms of vocabulary, therefore we managed to retain their knowledge and help them implement it in their daily life as well.

This study shows that students were aware of they were doing in class and they were active participants, hence, we do know that designing such motivational interactive activities helped them to have higher expectations and positive attitude toward language learning.

### Appendix A. Speaking Task 2

#### STEP ONE- QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

S1

##### 1<sup>ST</sup> QUESTION

1- What kind of a shopper are you? Do you like buying expensive things or cheaper things? Why?

##### 2<sup>nd</sup> QUESTION

2- Where is your favourite shopping area or place? Why do you like it most?

S2

##### 1<sup>st</sup> QUESTION

1- How often do you shop? What kinds of items do you dislike buying?

##### 2<sup>nd</sup> QUESTION

2- Would you prefer to go to a bazaar for shopping? Why / why not?

3-

#### STEP TWO- MONOLOGUE

S1

##### Talk about online shopping

You may say:

What the advantages are

What the disadvantages are

What kind of items you can buy online

**And say if you do online shopping or not and why / why not**

S2

##### Talk about shopping centres

You may say:

What the advantages are

What the disadvantages are

What kind of items people usually buy

**And say if you usually go to shopping centers or not and why / why not**

**Appendix B. Speaking Tasks 2**

**STEP ONE- QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION**

**S1**

**1<sup>ST</sup> QUESTION**

3- What do most people in your country like to eat?

**2<sup>nd</sup> QUESTION**

4- Where is your favourite restaurant? What do you like most about this restaurant?

**S2**

**1<sup>st</sup> QUESTION**

4- “Fast food is better than home-made food,” do you agree with this idea or not? Why?

**2<sup>nd</sup> QUESTION**

5- Which foods do you think are the best for your health? Why?

**STEP TWO- MONOLOGUE**

**S1**

**Talk about a person’s eating habits in your family**  
 You may say:  
     What he / she likes eating  
     What and where he / she does not prefer to eat  
     What kinds of places he / she eats out  
**And say if you think he / she has a healthy diet or not and why / why not**

**S2**

**Talk about vegetarian people**  
 You may say:  
     What kind of diet they have  
     Why people become vegetarians  
     What the disadvantages are  
**And say if you are a vegetarian or not and why / why not**

**Appendix C. Pre-Intermediate Target Words**

WEEK 1		WEEK 2		WEEK 3	
LIFE	REX	LIFE	REX	LIFE	REX
Expert	Conversation	Useless	Perform	Unfortunately	Benefit
Emotion	Feeling	Challenge	Familiar	Consumer	Independent
Survey	Creative	Pollution	Religious	Approximately	Harmful
Excitement	Encourage	Transport	Improve	Throw away	Lack of
Enthusiasm	Performance	According to	Concentrate	Similar	Depend on
Talent	Unusual	Local	Skill	Well-known	Outnumber

**Appendix D. Vocabulary Rubric**

<b>VOCABULARY RUBRIC</b>				
The student has a complete and detailed understanding of the term. The student creates explanations and descriptions of the term. The student can use the term in sentences	The student has a complete understanding of the term. The student creates explanations and description of the term.	The student does not completely understand the term. The student's explanation shows some mistakes about the meaning of term.	The student does not understand the term. The student makes many mistakes when explaining the meaning of the term.	The student does not try to describe the term.
<b>4 Points</b>	<b>3 Points</b>	<b>2 Points</b>	<b>1 Points</b>	<b>0 Points</b>
The student has a complete and detailed understanding of the term. The student creates explanations and descriptions of the term and the student can use the term in context	The student has a complete understanding of the term and generates explanations and descriptions of the term.	The student has an incomplete understanding of the topic or some misconceptions about the meaning of the term. However, the student has a basic understanding of the term.	The student has so many misconceptions about the term that the student cannot be said to understand the term.	Not enough information to make a judgment



**Appendix E: Speaking Assessment Analytic Rubric**

Category	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Poor (2)	Needs Work (1)	Score
<b>Vocabulary Use</b>	Student makes use of a wide range of vocabulary.	The student makes adequate use of vocabulary.	The student makes some inadequate use of vocabulary.	Inadequate use of vocabulary.	
<b>Fluency</b>	The student's message has easy flow and rhythm and presents normal hesitations and pauses.	The student's message is generally understandable and presents few hesitations and pauses.	The student's message is difficult to understand presenting awkward hesitations and pauses.	The student's message cannot be understood presenting many hesitations and pauses that interfere with the ideas.	
<b>Accuracy</b>	The student uses a variety of grammar structures which facilitate the speech comprehension.	The student makes few errors in grammatical structure even though the speech is understandable.	The student makes frequent grammatical errors which makes it difficult to understand.	The student makes many grammatical errors which makes the message non comprehensible.	
<b>Organization of Ideas</b>	The student presents all the information in a logical sequence.	The student presents most of the information in a logical sequence.	The student presents lack of coherence in the majority of ideas.	The student presents incoherence and no logical sequence of ideas.	
<b>Interaction</b>	The student cooperates actively with each other.	The student cooperates partially with each other.	The student cooperates deficiently with each other.	The student does not cooperate with each other at all.	
<b>Total Score: 20</b>					

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