

# Using Word Games To Improve The Reading Ability Of Primary Five Pupils Of Ejisu Model School

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**Abstract-** This study focused on investigating the use of word games as a tool for improving the reading abilities of primary five pupils at the Ejisu model school. Purposive sampling technique was used to select data for the study. A number of thirty (30) pupils were purposively selected as sample for the study. Action research design was considered appropriate for the study since the study identified a classroom problem and designed an intervention to solve it. Instruments such as observation, interviews and assessment test were used to gather data on the research problem. The data collected were analyzed using analytical tables, and percentages. Findings from the study revealed that practical instruction through word games improved pupils' word identification and reading skills tremendously. Pupils' interest in reading was also enhanced as they could read sentences provided by the teacher afterwards. It is therefore concluded that using game based instruction in teaching has positive effects on improving pupils' ability to identify words and read. The study recommends that equally effective strategies for enhancing reading skills can be investigated with other classes. Also, school heads should ensure that appropriate language materials are made available to teachers. In-service training should also be provided for teachers to update them on improved methods and strategies of teaching.

**Index Terms-** Assessment Tests, Word Games, Observation, Practical, Reading Skills

## I. INTRODUCTION

English language subject is not only indispensable in the academic field but also equips individuals to communicate effectively with other people in and around the world. As a result, English language is gradually becoming a first language to a lot of Ghanaians and therefore its enforcement will go a long way to help build the nation in a more conscious manner and help to instill confidence in users of the language. It is quite unfortunate that the number of pupils who can read and understand the English Language are very few and this has become one of the major reasons why most pupils fail in their final examinations.

Adotey (1996) head of West African Examinations Council, in his speech delivered at the 2015 meeting of stakeholders of education in Ghanaian basic schools, has expressed that most pupils do not perform well in the English Language specifically, reading comprehension. He further said that English language needs to be taught well to enhance the reading skills of pupils at

the early years to prevent any future 'disaster' of having masses of students who cannot read and concerning the inability of a large number of pupils to read and understand the Language.

Again, for proper improvement in the performance of students in the English language, there ought to be good planning and management since the educational policy of the government of Ghana, emphasizes the importance of reading language in schools, especially at the upper primary. Research has indicated that one way of improving the reading skills of pupils is through the implementation of game-based instruction during the early elementary grades. Game-based learning activities provide interactive learning models that often increase students' motivation to engage in the learning process. Classroom organization is very important during language games. Lee (1980) is of the view that the success of many games depends to a very large extent on good class organization. He therefore outlined some strategies that can be used during language games to make them successful in class. These include:

Dividing pupils into teams/groups. The number of groups/teams will depend on the size of the class. However, he is of the view that this should not be done frequently as this can waste a lot of time. He also said that children tend to have a sense of belonging if they are in the same group for long time, at least for a whole year. Frequent changing of groups could affect their sense of belonging negatively.

Secondly, teams/groups created should be given appropriate names. With respect to names of teams/groups, Lee (1980) posits that names for the various teams/groups should be suitable. Names that will excite pupils should be used. He suggested that names like sparrow, robins and skylarks may be pleasing to children in a place where these birds are well known. He also suggested names of popular animals like lions, tigers, etc as well as colours and cardinal points have broader appeal and are widely accepted. He however, thinks that much depends on the age of the children and the country where one is teaching. In related research, Baker (2001) suggested that, the use of the child's first language in education has been shown to enhance the academic linguistic, and cognitive achievement of learners. The use of a Ghanaian language as the medium of instruction in the early-exit transitional model is too short-term for children to understand the complex workings of their L1 for them to transfer it effectively and efficiently to the L2 (Owu-Wie, 2006).

One other essential strategy in organizing the classroom for games, according to Lee (1980), is that team/group members should be evenly matched, if there is to be any competition or

contest. This is to ensure that no team or group is at an advantage over the other. If the above average pupils and the below average ones are unevenly matched, some groups or teams will always be at the winning end and the others at the losing end. This can be discouraging for those always at the losing end. Lee (1980) also argues that teams should be larger than groups. This should be done taking the class size into consideration. This is one way of multiplying language practice. The arrangement should be done in such a way that the teacher or facilitator should be able to move from one group to the other easily and as quickly as possible. Pair activity is also recommended. According to him it can give a greater amount of communication practice, even though this creates less opportunity for pupils to consult each other and do some mutual correction. Teams/groups are preferred in very large classes though pair work is advantageous.

Additionally, scoring and the methods of scoring points of competition during language games should vary. Lee (1980) advised that it is psychologically, good to award points for success than to take them away for failure, even if this process keeps the scorers very busy. He suggested that images of things which climb or expand are useful as means of visually representing the scores. In general, using these technological and pedagogical approaches benefits the learning experience, be it in performance, learning, knowledge, satisfaction, or motivation (Tobar-Munoz, Fabregat, et al., 2014). This study is to investigate the use of word games to improve the reading ability of primary five pupils in Ejisu model.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The topic "Teaching oral reading in Primary 5 class using word games at Ejisu Model School" was chosen based on observations made during internship teaching practice in the school. It was detected that pupils at primary five found it very difficult to read simple sentences written in English Language. Further observation proved that certain approaches used in teaching the subject made the entire lessons boring and also teacher centered with less pupil involvement. Critical examination and analysis of the situation attributed pupils' poor interest in the subject to lack of participation by pupils in English lessons. The situation provides motivation to delve into ways in which a different teaching strategy; which is game based instruction and which will cause pupils to take active part in teaching and learning of English language, specifically the reading aspect, believed to help pupils improve upon their reading skills as many research have attested to this fact (Lee, 1980).

## III. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The rationale for this study is to adopt one tested and proven strategy (game-based instruction) which provides pupils opportunity to actively engage in the teaching and learning process. This gives them the opportunity to practice skills and memorize words in order to achieve mastery through play. When students are provided student-centered learning activities, such as game-based learning, they may experience improvement and rapid word recognition as they engage in a developmentally appropriate learning process.

## Research Objectives

The research basically seeks to:

1. Find out the effects or impact game-based instruction have on the reading abilities of children in a basic school in Ghana.
2. Find how the use of word games could be used to achieve word identification and improve upon the reading skills of pupils in class five (5)

## Research Question

1. To what extent does game-based instruction have on pupils' ability to identify simple words and enhance their reading potencies?
2. To what extent does the use of word games help in improving the reading ability of pupils?

## IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK – WORD GAMES

Language teaching experts have outlined a number of reasons why language games could be used in teaching English. Adam (2014) has underscored ten very interesting reasons for using games to teach English.

First of all, games create context for meaningful communication. Adam (2016) opines that all games create meaningful contexts for communication to some extent. Though some games revolve around discrete language items such as grammar and spelling, meaningful communication happens because learners need to process how to play the game as well as communicate about the game before, during and after. This meaningful communication serves as a basis for comprehensible input. Basically, comprehensible input is what pupils understand as they listen, read and interact to improve comprehensibility such as asking for repetition or giving examples. This leads to comprehensible output as pupils are speaking and/ or writing so that their peers can understand.

Secondly, games add interest to what learners find boring. A long term effort is needed in learning a language and maintaining interest means sustaining effort. This is usually difficult especially for young learners. It is therefore important to shape a learning task in the form of a game, since it piques the interest of learners who see it as different to what they usually do in class. Also, games can be used with all the language skills. They can be tailor made to focus on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A combination of skills can be involved in the same game. They are therefore good tools for appealing to different types of learners at the same time.

Furthermore, games offer a fun experience since they make children excited. The emotions aroused when learners play games add variety to what is often a sterile, serious process of language learning.

More so, games encourage participation from all learners as they offer variety and intensity which this lowers the anxiety of learners. They encourage even introverts to participate, especially when games are played in small groups.

In addition, games are learner- centered activities. Truly, games are learner-centered because learners are not only active when playing games but are also made to play leadership roles with the teachers being facilitators.

Other useful tips on the use of games include promotion of cooperative learning and turn-taking.

## V. METHODOLOGY

The study employed an action research design. Action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research (Agyedu, Donkor, Obeng 2011). It is designed and conducted by practitioners who analyze data to improve their own practice within a certain domain of a profession. This design was chosen for this study because the researcher has identified a problem in the classroom and has proposed an intervention to curb this problem.

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or object that is the main focus of a scientific query. According to Mugo (2009), research population consists of a group of individuals, persons, object or items from which samples are taken for measurement. The population sample for this study consisted of basic five pupils from Ejisu Model School. This class was purposively chosen because the researcher came into contact with the class and observed that pupils could not recognize simple words and also could not read simple sentences from their reading books and from the chalkboard.

The research instrument used for the study was test. This instrument was deemed appropriate for the gathering of data for the research because it was practicable within a given time, resource constraints and the feasibility of using it within a given context. It was also appropriate for the achievement of the research objective and was able to produce data for addressing the research question.

The intervention design and how it was implemented took three phases. These phases included the pre-intervention stage, intervention stage and post –intervention stage.

At this stage, the researcher collected the needed data and information about the research problem in question in order to understand it better. In order to solidify the claim made by the researcher, pre-test questions were conducted to assess the pupil's ability in terms of word recognition as well as reading skills. This was also done so that the efficacy of the intervention could appropriately be measured.

During the intervention period, tests was the major instrument used in collecting data. The types of language games used for the intervention were basically dominoes games, writing games and vocabulary. The treatment process lasted for 3 weeks. During this period three major parameters were the focus of the study. They were: word identification skills, reading skills, and pupils' perception towards the use of word games in teaching English language. For the first week of the study, pupils were introduced to letters, sounds of letters, consonants and vowels and blending of sounds. This was followed by a video game on blending of sounds. This exercise was to help lay a good foundation for the reading and other games pupils were going to be engaged in. This was followed by another word game known as dominoes. In using this game, the following activities were done:

- The game was played in pairs. The researcher made sure that there were blank cards in the cards that were given out to the children.

- The remaining pile was stacked face down on the table.
- Each pupil had 7 dominoes. The pupils lay the dominoes out on the table so that they can read the words on the cards.
- The first pupil started the game by playing one of his dominoes.
- The next pupil will then try to play one of his /her dominoes by pacing it next to the first domino. The catch is that it has to have an end that matches the same number of pips as one end of the previously- played domino.
- If the second player /pupil does not have any dominoes with matching value to the already played, he/she must choose another domino from the number of dominoes he/she possesses until a domino that can be played is chosen.
- This pattern continues until either one of the players win by playing all of his/her dominoes. Thus the winner is the first pupil to use up all the seven dominoes given him or her.

As this game is played, pupils are made to read out a sentence as they make it, and encourage lots of talk around each sentence. The main emphasis of dominoes is to help improve the word recognition skills of learners as well equipping them with reading skills.

In the second week, the researcher introduced another game called "Who am I". This game was to strengthen the pupils' ability to recognize words already learnt. A pupil picked a flash card from a box and called out a friend's name, then showed the card on which the word treated was written. "The pupil with the card asks, 'Who am I'? Referring to the word on the card, a colleague will respond to it by identifying the word on the card.

During the third week, pupils were introduced to the flash card game. This game was in levels, ranging from simple to complex words as the games progressed. In this game, pupils contested in reading, word formation and spelling. They contested in teams and as individuals. Pupils were further engaged in other reading and vocabulary games. Here, pupils also contested at both team and individual levels.

At the end of each week pupils were tested to measure their progress in the various skills being measured (word identification/ recognition and reading skills). Further, pupils were given homework each day to practice what have been learnt. This was administered during the last week of the research. The aim was to find out how effective the intervention had been and whether pupils had benefited from the intervention. As a result, a comprehensive assessment test was conducted, the test comprised two sections. Sections A and B. Section A was word identification test. Words were written on the chalkboard for pupils to point to and pronounce them individually. Section B was a sentence reading test. Pupils were called individually to read aloud paragraph/text taken from their reading books.

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze research questions one and two. The data was analyzed using SPSS software version 15. The data was then converted into tables for easy analysis and presentation. Each table was presented using the number of respondents and their scores including percentages. Research question three was then analyzed using transcribed data from the interview conducted with some of the respondents.

VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

**Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses results of the pre-intervention and post-intervention design of the study. It also discusses data gathered from the interviews conducted with some of the participants of the study.

**Pre-test Results**

Before the intervention students were assessed on their ability to recognize words as well as their reading abilities. Table 4.1 depicts the pre-test results of pupil's abilities to recognize words.

**Table 4.1: Word Recognition scores (Pre-Intervention Test Scores)**

Mark interval	Frequency	Percentage%
60-64	0	0
55-59	2	6.67
50-54	0	0
45-49	1	3.33
40-44	0	0
35-39	3	10.00
30-34	0	0
25-29	3	10.00
20-29	6	19.98
20-24	3	10.00
15-19	3	10.00
10-14	7	23.33
5-9	2	6.67
0-4	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table 4.1, thirty pupils took the test. It was seen from the table that out of thirty (30) pupils who took the test, only six (6) pupils representing (20%) scored above the average mark which was 30% whilst twenty four (24) pupils, representing (80%) scored below the average mark. From the table, it was obvious that the general performance of pupils under study was well below average, in terms of their ability to recognize or identify words. As a result, there was the need to put in measures in order to improve upon the performance of pupils.

**Pre-Test Results**

**Table 4.2: Sentence Reading Test (Pre-Intervention Test Scores)**

Mark interval	Frequency	Percentage%
60	2	6.67
55-59	1	3.33
50-54	0	0
45-49	2	6.67
35-39	2	6.67
30-34	0	0
25-29	2	6.67

20-24	2	6.67
15-19	5	16.67
10-14	3	10.00
5-9	11	33.66
0-4	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.2 shows the distribution of pupils score in the sentence reading test. Thirty pupils took the test and it was marked over sixty. The table indicated that, majority of the pupils were not able to read a passage of reading test given to them prior to the intervention as twenty three (13) pupils representing (76.7%) scored below the average mark which was thirty(30).Only seven (7) pupils scored above the average mark.

**Research Question One: To What Extent Does the Use of Word Games Helps in Pupil's Identification of Simple Words?**

Research question one sought to find out the effect of word games on pupils' word recognition and identification. Table 4.3 shows the pupils word recognition and identification scores after the intervention

**Table 4.3: Words Recognition Scores (Post –Intervention Test Scores)**

Mark interval	Frequency	Percentage%
60-64	4	13.32
55-59	6	19.99
50-54	5	16.65
45-49	5	16.65
40-44	3	13.33
35-39	0	0
30-34	0	0
25-29	0	0
20-24	1	3.33
15-19	0	0
10-14	1	3.33
5-9	4	13.23
0-4	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.3 presents the distribution of pupil's scores in word recognition test during the post-test. The table shows that thirty pupils took part in the test. Sixty marks were awarded for the test. The table again shows that majority of the pupils who took the test performed above the average mark. This is clearly seen in the results as twenty-three (23) pupils, representing (76.7%) performed above average while only seven (7) pupils representing (23.3) scored below the average mark. This results clearly depicted massive improvement in pupils' ability to recognize and identify as many words as compared to the results obtained before the introduction of the intervention. It could therefore be concluded that the use of word games has positive effects on pupils' ability to recognize and identify words. This result is in conformity with a study conducted by Chen (2005) who reported that the use of game based instructions motivate pupils in the classroom. Further, these findings also confirm the findings study conducted by Khalidiyah (2017), whose results indicated that pupils' ability to identify and recognize words improve when they were given game based instruction, specifically using dominoes.

In a similar view Casser and Jang (2010) found that using games for teaching word recognition skills improved literacy skills.

**Research Question Two: To What Extent Does the Use of Word Games Help in Improving the Reading Ability of Pupils?**

Table 4.4 depicted the results of pupils reading ability after they have gone through the intervention.

**Table 4.4: Sentence Reading Test (Post-Intervention Test Scores)**

Mark interval	Frequency	Percentage%
60-64	6	20.00
55-59	4	13.33
50-54	6	20.00
45-49	3	10
35-39	2	6.67
30-34	1	3.33
25-29	3	10
20-24	3	10
15-19	1	3.33
10-14	1	3.33
5-9	0	0
0-4	0	0
Total	30	100

Table 4.4 shows the performance of pupils in post –test performance. From the table it could be seen that majority of the pupils, twenty-two (22) representing (73.3%) performed above average whilst eight (8) pupils representing (26.7%) performed below the average mark which was 30%. This suggests that the performance of pupils in terms of their reading skills have improved. It could therefore be concluded that the use of word games have positive effects on pupils’ reading ability. This finding confirms what Arikan et al (2011) found in their study. Their study found out that the use of language games in instruction goes a long way to improve upon pupils’ reading skills as compared to the traditional method of teaching.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

This study has looked into the reading potentialities of pupils in one government assisted basic school in Ghana. It has focused mainly on the abilities of pupils to identify simple words and also read simple sentences. The pre intervention test administered revealed serious lapses in the pupils’ ability to identify words and read. After series of interventional measures were put in place, the researcher discovered a very significant improvement in pupils; ability to recognize words and also read. Additionally, the practical nature of word games provided the pupils with enough opportunity to practice and learn with fun. This resulted in increase in pupils’ enthusiasm as they could read freely and with great joy. The study therefore indicates that word games are effective teaching strategies which when exploited, can be beneficial to young learners. Also, the study’s findings indicate that word games could be an important resource for teachers since

it is practical and lends freely to interaction. However, user expertise and tact are required for effective administration and results.

**VIII. RECOMMENDATION**

Finally, the study recommends that other strategies which are equally effective for enhancing pupils’ reading skills can be examined/investigated with other classes. Also, school heads and the Ghana Education Service should ensure that appropriate language materials be made available to teachers. In service training should also be provided for teachers to update them on improved methods and strategies for teaching.

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