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Teaching vocabulary to Turkish young learners in semantically related and semantically unrelated sets by using digital storytelling

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Abstract

Teaching vocabulary is a comprehensive process in foreign language learning requiring specific techniques of appropriate instruction and accurate strategy. The present study was conducted to examine the effects of teaching vocabulary to Turkish young learners in semantic clustering way through digital storytelling. To investigate this aim, six video stories were chosen and studied in sequence. The research was carried out with 25 sixth graders during 6 weeks. Totally 6 stories were presented by teacher: three of them were taught in semantically related and three of them were taught in semantically unrelated sets. SPSS 20 package program was used to analyze all collected data. Learners developed their vocabulary at the end of both processes but with different ratio. Participants scored better at semantically unrelated vocabulary teaching process than semantically related vocabulary teaching process.

Keywords: Young learners, teaching vocabulary, semantic sets, digital storytelling

1. Introduction

Teaching vocabulary has recently become one of the popular research subjects in English language study field. According to Nam (2010), vocabulary encourages the students to improve the four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Consequently, teaching vocabulary with effective methods plays an important role in foreign language acquisition. Nowadays, the researchers are searching for more efficient ways of teaching vocabulary by comparing the previous methods with the latest ones. One of these popular comparisons has been made in the context of presenting new vocabulary in semantically related (SR) and semantically unrelated (SUR) sets. Mirjalili, Jabbari, and Rezai (2012, p. 214) defined SR sets "…as words which share the same semantic and syntactic characteristics, grouped under a common concept (for example; flower names)". SUR sets were described "…as words which don't share similar semantic and syntactic characteristics and are not associated in any concept".

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The participants of the study were young learners aged 11 and 12. This age group has been chosen regarding the Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which is divided into four different stages of mental development (Charles, 2003). The table below illustrates the characteristics of each stage:

Table 1. Stages of cognitive development

Stage	Characterized by
Sensory-motor (Birth-2 years)	Differentiates self from objects recognizes self as agent of action and begins to act intentionally E.g. pulls a string to set mobile in motion or shakes a rattle to make a noise
Pre-operational (2-7 years)	Learns to use language and to represent objects by images and words Thinking is still egocentric: has difficulty taking the viewpoint of others
Concrete operational (7-11 years)	Can think logically about objects and events Achieves conservation of number (age 6), mass (age 7), and weight (age 9)
Formal operational (11 years and up)	Can think logically about abstract propositions and test hypotheses systematically Becomes concerned with the hypothetical, the future, and ideological problems

As it is represented on the table above, Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that children move through four different stages of mental development. His theory focuses not only on understanding how children acquire knowledge, but also on understanding the nature of intelligence. In order to receive more reliable data during research process, the formal operational group was chosen as participants of the present study.

1.1. Literature review

While reviewing the previous studies conducted on related subject, the results of the investigations mostly take sides of using semantic clustering sets. The results of a study carried out with Turkish fourth graders indicated that the learning words in SUR sets had better results than learning new words in SR sets (Erten & Tekin, 2008).

Another point of view regarding the positive effect of SR sets was explained by Jang (2014) in his study, which was aimed to investigate the effectiveness of presenting new SR second language (L2) words and presenting new SUR L2 words. Jang cited that learning L2 words in SR sets requires more effort from learners than learning L2 words in SUR sets, providing interference of similar words.

Nowbakht (2015) conducted a study with the students of Iran Language Institute in order to investigate the comparative effects of presenting new words in SR and SUR sets on the receptive acquisition of L2 vocabulary items. The findings of the study revealed that presenting new words in SR sets may prevent receptive vocabulary acquisition due to increase in the confusion between similar words.

The evidence against learning vocabulary items in SUR sets was provided by Hashemi and Gowdasiaei (2005). The results of the study carried out with 60 EFL Iranian high school students indicated that L2 vocabulary should be presented in semantic sets within an appropriate context. The

results of the study were consistent with the argument that presenting vocabulary in SR sets was more beneficial for students than SUR sets (Aitchison, 1994; Hycraft, 1993).

Digital stories as the way of presenting the new vocabulary at the present study have been gaining more popularity as they became easily accessible. It is quite normal to use digital stories in English lessons nowadays (see: Robin, 2005; Tsou, Wang, & Tzeng, 2006; Valkanova & Watts, 2007; Sadık, 2008). Köse and Küçükoğlu (2012, p. 396) refered to Gregori-Signes (2008) and produced a definition for digital stories as "3-5 minute long computer-based and user-generated short video clips that enable learners to utilize and combine various skills [...]." Digital storytelling is regarded as the new way of expressing stories with and without using traditional methods of storytelling (Alcantud-Díaz, Vayá, & Gregori-Signes, 2014).

1.2. Research questions

The present study was conducted to examine the effects of teaching vocabulary in semantic clustering way through digital storytelling.

For the purpose of this study, the following three research questions were addressed:

1 - Is there any difference between semantically related and semantically unrelated matching test scores of young learners?

2 - Is there any difference between semantically related and semantically unrelated spelling test scores of young learners?

3 - Is there any difference between semantically related/unrelated pre-tests and post-tests scores of young learners?

2. Method

2.1. Sample / Participants

The study was conducted at a private primary school in Muğla province, Turkey. The participants of the study were 25 sixth graders. There were 16 males and 9 females. The participants were aged 11 and 12 years old. They were studying English language courses as a part of formal national curriculum with a female English language teacher. The participants were being taught English with the help of technological instruments such as smart board, video technology, powerpoint and internet sources. All the participants started to learn English at the same time and they exposed nearly to the same teaching-learning processes.

2.2. Instrument(s)

The required data were collected with pre-tests and post-tests prepared by the researchers (See Appendices). During six weeks of treatment, each week 10 words and in total 60 words were taught. Pre-tests contained 20 words to choose the least unknown 10 words. After each pre-test, all words were scored according to the answers of learners. Thus, the least unknown words were defined and they formed the post-test of each story. Words were chosen in different word forms such as nouns, verbs and adjectives. The shortest word possessed three letters and the longest nine letters.

2.3. Data collection procedures

As it is indicated in Table 2, the study was composed of 6 different stories. Three of these stories were used to teach SR vocabulary, while the other three for teaching SUR vocabulary. In this study, SR vocabulary were taught one week and SUR vocabulary at the following week and this sequence

was followed throughout the study. Two pre-tests and two post-tests were administrated to obtain the scores of the participants.

Table 2. The schedule of data collection procedure

Period	Pre-tests	Instruction	Post-tests
Week 1	M1 Pre-test Matching 1 S1 Pre-test Spelling 1	Story 1 Semantically Related Vocabulary	M7 Post-test Matching 1 S7 Post-test Spelling 1
Week 2	M2 Pre-test Matching 2 S2 Pre-test Spelling 2	Story 2 Semantically Unrelated Vocabulary	M8 Post-test Matching 2 S8 Post-test Spelling 2
Week 3	M3 Pre-test Matching 3 S3 Pre-test Spelling 3	Story 3 Semantically Related Vocabulary	M9 Post-test Matching 3 S9 Post-test Spelling 3
Week 4	M4 Pre-test Matching 4 S4 Pre-test Spelling 4	Story 4 Semantically Unrelated Vocabulary	M10 Post-test Matching 4 S10 Post-test Spelling 4
Week 5	M5 Pre-test Matching 5 S5 Pre-test Spelling 5	Story 5 Semantically Related Vocabulary	M11 Post-test Matching 5 S11 Post-test Spelling 5
Week 6	M6 Pre-test Matching 6 S6 Pre-test Spelling 6	Story 6 Semantically Unrelated Vocabulary	M12 Post-test Matching 6 S12 Post-test Spelling 6

2.4. Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, pre-test and pos-test results of each treatment were scored initially. Correct answers were given one point but false answers were not graded and false answers did not affect the correct answers or total point. Learners could have 10 points by answering all questions right and zero point by answering none in a test.

Test scores of learners were analyzed quantitatively by using SPSS 20.0 software program by calculating the mean scores and making comparisons between different assessment results of SR and SUR vocabulary tests. Descriptive statistics were used to define the means, standard deviation and range. Paired samples t-test statistics was used to make comparison between the computed means of different vocabulary test results.

3. Results

In order to examine the effects of SR and SUR vocabulary teaching sessions, the results of collected data were presented in three steps. First descriptive statistics of matching and spelling tests (in total 24 tests) were tabulated to show mean and standard deviation scores. Then, the mean scores of SR and SUR tests were grouped individually. This way of recalculating the mean scores gave us the chance of examining the pre-test and post-test mean scores in SR and SUR groups so that it became possible to see the variation between two SR groups and two SUR groups. Afterwards t-test analysis was used to examine the scores of SR pre-matching and post-matching, SUR pre-matching and post-matching, SR pre-spelling and post-spelling, SUR pre-spelling and post-spelling tests.

4.1. Research Question 1: Is there any difference between semantically related and semantically unrelated matching test scores of young learners?

In the course of the study, 6 pre-tests and 6 post-tests, 12 matching tests in total, were administrated. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of matching tests with their mean scores out of ten points. The mean scores of pre-tests are between 2.88 and .88 ($\bar{X}$max = 2.88, SD = 2.47; $\bar{X}$min = .88, SD = 1.2), while the mean scores of post-tests are between 9.21 and 6.52 ($\bar{X}$max = 9.2, SD = 1.12; $\bar{X}$min = 6.52, SD = 3.34).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of matching test scores

Test	Group	N	M	SD
Matching Tests	Pre-test 1	25	1.76	2.15
	Pre-test 2	25	2.28	1.99
	Pre-test 3	25	2.88	2.47
	Pre-test 4	25	2.68	2.36
	Pre-test 5	25	1.52	1.45
	Pre-test 6	25	.88	1.20
	Post-test 1	14	9.21	1.12
	Post-test 2	13	9.15	1.35
	Post-test 3	25	6.72	3.29
	Post-test 4	25	7.80	3.06
	Post-test 5	25	6.52	3.34
	Post-test 6	25	7.60	2.51

The mean scores of matching 6 pre-tests and 6 post-tests were grouped as being SR and SUR sets.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of matching test score means

Test	Group	N	M	SD
Pre-test	SR	25	2.05	.94
	SU	25	1.94	1.07
Post-test	SR	25	6.95	2.35
	SU	25	7.89	1.45

Table 4 illustrates the mean scores of pre-tests and post-tests according to their SR and SUR groups. As Table 4 shows, the mean score of pre-test SR group was 2.05 ($\bar{X}$= 2.05, SD = .94) and pre-test SUR group was 1.94 ($\bar{X}$= 1.94, SD = 1.07), while the mean score of post-test SR group was 6.95 ($\bar{X}$= 6.95, SD = 2.35) and post-test SUR group was 7.89 ($\bar{X}$= 7.89, SD = 1.45). Knowing the mean scores of semantic groups makes it possible to compare the mean scores of SR and SUR groups in order to see whether they are equal or not. Variation between mean scores of semantic groups of pre-tests and post-test was calculated by subtracting mean score of post-tests from mean score of pre-tests.

Variation of SR Matching Tests: SR Post-test mean – SR Pre-test mean

= 6.95-2.05 = 4.90

Variation of SUR Matching Tests: SUR Post-test mean – SUR Pre-test mean

= 7.89-1.94 = 5.95

When the variation scores of post-tests and pre-tests were considered, it is seen that SUR matching test scores (variation = 5.95) outperformed the SR matching test scores (variation = 4.90). Tests scores of the participants were higher at the SUR tests than the SR tests.

4.2. Research Question 2: Is there any difference between semantically related and semantically unrelated spelling test scores of young learners?

Another way of measuring the participants' performance was spelling tests. In addition to 12 matching tests, 12 spelling tests; 6 of them as pre-tests and 6 of them as post-tests; were administrated during the study. Table 5 indicates the descriptive statistics of spelling test scores.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of spelling test scores

Test	Group	N	M	SD
Spelling Tests	Pre-test 1	25	3.80	3.14
	Pre-test 2	25	4.61	2.76
	Pre-test 3	25	6.04	2.54
	Pre-test 4	25	4.36	3.34
	Pre-test 5	25	1.96	2.57
	Pre-test 6	25	2.88	2.47
	Post-test 1	25	6.76	2.54
	Post-test 2	25	6.88	3.40
	Post-test 3	25	7.80	2.24
	Post-test 4	25	8.00	2.47
	Post-test 5	25	6.44	2.56
	Post-test 6	25	6.56	2.77

As it was shown in Table 5, the mean scores of pre-tests are between 6.04 and 1.96 ($\bar{X}$max = 6.04, SD = 2.54; $\bar{X}$min = 1.96, SD = 2.57), while the mean scores of post-tests are between 8.00 and 6.44 ($\bar{X}$max = 8.00, SD = 2.47; $\bar{X}$min = 6.44, SD = 2.56).

The mean scores of 6 pre-tests and 6 post-tests of spelling were grouped in terms of being SR and SUR sets.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of spelling test score means

Test	Group	N	M	SD
Pre-test	SR	25	3.93	1.25
	SU	25	3.95	1.51
Post-test	SR	25	7.00	1.39
	SU	25	7.15	1.51

Table 6 shows the mean scores of pre-tests and post-tests according to their SR and SUR groups. The mean score of pre-test SR group was 3.93 ($\bar{X}$= 3.93, SD = 1.25) and pre-test SUR group was 3.95 ($\bar{X}$= 3.95, SD = 1.51) while the mean score of post-tests SR group was 7.00 ($\bar{X}$= 7.00, SD = 1.39) and post-test SUR was 7.15 ($\bar{X}$= 7.15, SD = 1.51). Mean scores of SR and SUR groups of spelling tests were compared to see whether score of a group is higher than the other. Variation between mean scores of semantic groups of pre-tests and post-tests was calculated by subtracting mean score of post-tests from mean score of pre-tests.

Variation of SR Spelling Tests: SR Post-test mean – SR Pre-test mean

= 7.00-3.93 = 3.07

Variation of SUR Spelling Tests: SUR Post-test mean – SUR Pre-test mean

= 7.15-3.95 = 3.20

If the variation scores of post-tests and pre-tests were taken into consideration, it is found that SUR spelling test scores (Variation = 3.20) outperformed again the SR matching test scores (variation = 3.07).

4.3. Research Question 3: Is there any difference between semantically related/unrelated pre-tests and post-tests scores of young learners?

After analyzing the mean scores of different semantic groups, t-test results were examined by making comparison between pre-tests and post-test mean scores. Firstly, matching test results of SR groups were analyzed and the results are presented at the Table 7 below.

Table 7. T-test results of semantically related pre-matching and post-matching tests

Tests	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Pre-Matching SR	25	2.05	.94	48	9.67	.001
Post-Matching SR	25	6.95	2.35			

As it is stated in Table 7, there is a significant difference between SR pre-matching and post-matching test results $t(48) = 9.67$, $p<.001$. Post-matching test result ($\bar{X} = 6.95$) is higher than pre-matching test result ($\bar{X} = 2.05$).

Secondly, matching test results of SUR groups were analysed and indicated at the Table 8 below.

Table 8. T-test results of semantically unrelated pre-matching and post-matching tests

Tests	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Pre-Matching SUR	25	1.96	1.03	48	16.65	.001
Post-Matching SUR	25	7.89	1.45			

As it is shown in Table 8, a significant difference is found between pre-matching and post-matching test results $t(48) = 16.65$, $p<.001$ and the mean of post-matching test ($\bar{X} = 1.96$) is higher than pre-matching test ($\bar{X} = 7.89$).

Thirdly, the results of spelling tests were analysed with t-test to see any possible differences between them.

Table 9. T-test results of semantically related pre-spelling and post-spelling tests

Tests	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Pre-Spelling SR	25	3.93	1.25	48	8.17	.001
Post-Spelling SR	25	7.00	1.39			

As it is stated in Table 9, a high significant difference between SR pre-spelling and post-spelling test results is found $t(48) = 8.17$, $p<.001$. Post-spelling test result ($\bar{X} = 7.00$) is higher than pre-spelling test result ($\bar{X} = 3.93$).

Table 10. T-test results of semantically unrelated pre-spelling and post-spelling tests

Tests	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Pre-Spelling SUR	25	4.25	1.52	48	6.45	.001
Post-Spelling SUR	25	7.15	1.51			

SUR test results showed similarity with SR test results. When Table10 is taken into consideration, a significant difference is seen between SUR pre-spelling and post-spelling test results $t(48) = 6.45$, $p<.001$. Post-spelling test result ($\bar{X} = 7.15$) is higher than pre-spelling test result ($\bar{X} = 4.25$).

4. Discussion

The research aims to investigate the relationship between two ways of vocabulary teaching; i.e., SR and SUR. After the analysis of the collected data, it was observed that the test scores of participants increased at both techniques of vocabulary teaching but at different ratio. However, it can be concluded that participants' vocabulary test scores developed better after SUR vocabulary teaching process.

Besides, two different assessment techniques, which are matching tests and spelling tests, are administered as pre-test and post-test to increase the reliability of the research. The results of these two different assessment methods show similarities with each other and the direction of relationship is at the same way. Participants' test scores increased at both techniques. A significant difference is found between pre-test and post-test scores of both matching and spelling tests.

Before the implementation of vocabulary teaching sessions, one may hypothesize that the SR vocabulary achievement results of learners can be better than the SUR vocabulary achievement results. However, this study, in line with the previous studies, gave different results and showed implications in favour of SUR vocabulary teaching. This study supports the idea that presenting new vocabulary in SUR sets may be much more effective than presenting in SR sets. This result of the study may be in contradiction with constructivist methodology, schemata theory and Gestalt psychology initially. However, when the process is thought from a wider perspective, the results can be quite related with constructivist methodology, schemata theory and Gestalt psychology (Williams, & Burden, 1997; Brown, 2001; Richards, & Rodgers, 2001; Lightbown, & Spada, 2006). The learners may prefer to reconstruct the vocabulary, which is presented in SUR sets, instead of trying to internalize the vocabulary sets, which is presented in SR sets.

5. Conclusions

As the answer to the first research question 'Is there any difference between SR and SUR matching test scores', it is seen that the participants scored better at the SUR tests than the SR tests. Regarding the answer to the second research question 'Is there any difference between SR and SUR spelling test scores', the test scores of participants were higher at the SUR tests than those of SR tests. This result shows a similarity to variation scores of the matching test results. Participants scored better at the SUR tests than the SR tests as they did in matching tests. So the answers of the first and second research questions are in the same line. The answers to the third research question 'Is there any difference between SR/SUR pre-test and post-test scores', the post-matching test result is higher than the pre-matching test result of SR pre- and post- matching tests. It is also calculated that the mean of post-matching SUR test is higher than pre-matching SUR test. Similarly, the post-spelling SR test result is higher than the pre-spelling SR test result. Post-spelling SUR test result is also higher than pre-spelling SUR test result. In short, this study concludes that young learners developed their vocabulary results both at SR and SUR tests at the end of vocabulary studying process.

The results of the present study are in line with previous studies and the findings support each other. Erten and Tekin (2008) studied the recall of vocabulary which is taught in SR and SUR sets and found that vocabulary taught in SUR sets were learned better. They stated that vocabulary presented in SR sets might hinder learning. Also Jang (2014) conducted a research with young Korean English

learners and taught vocabulary in SR and SUR sets. Jang found that the performance was better at SUR vocabulary teaching sessions.

Further studies aiming to focus on the reasons of the difference between SR and SUR vocabulary teaching may give us more profound idea to learn about the underlying reasons of these kinds of studies.

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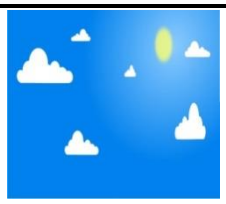
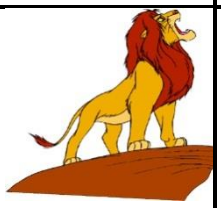
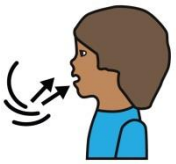
Appendix A. Lesson plan

1. Brainstorming
2. Watching the video for the first time
3. First comprehension checks (asking some questions, like what is the main subject of the story?)
4. Presenting new vocabulary (Power point slideshow is presented)
5. Watching for the second time
6. Classroom discussion
7. Watching for the last time
8. Implementing Post-tests activities (Matching and Spelling)

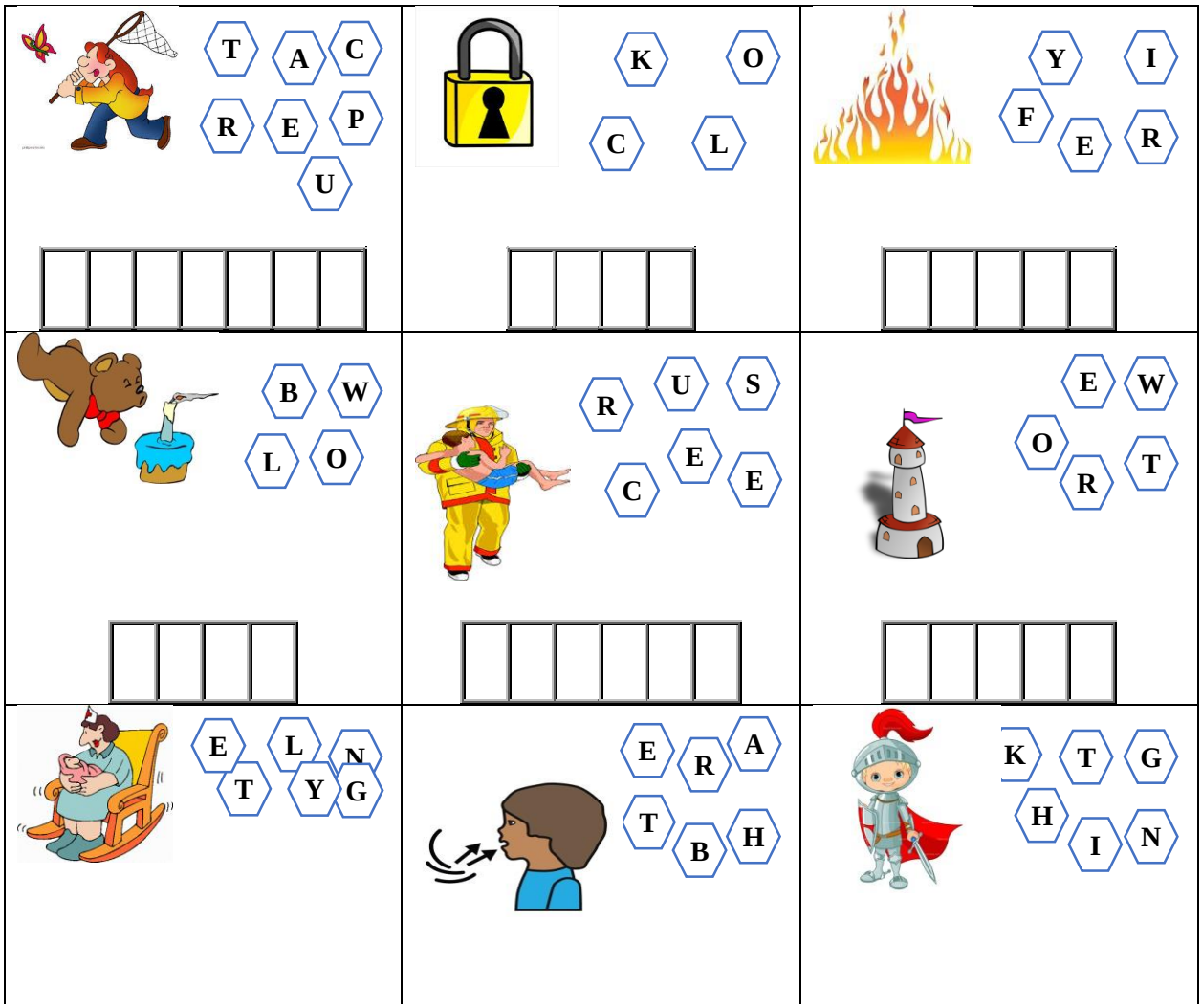
Appendix B. A sample of matching post-test

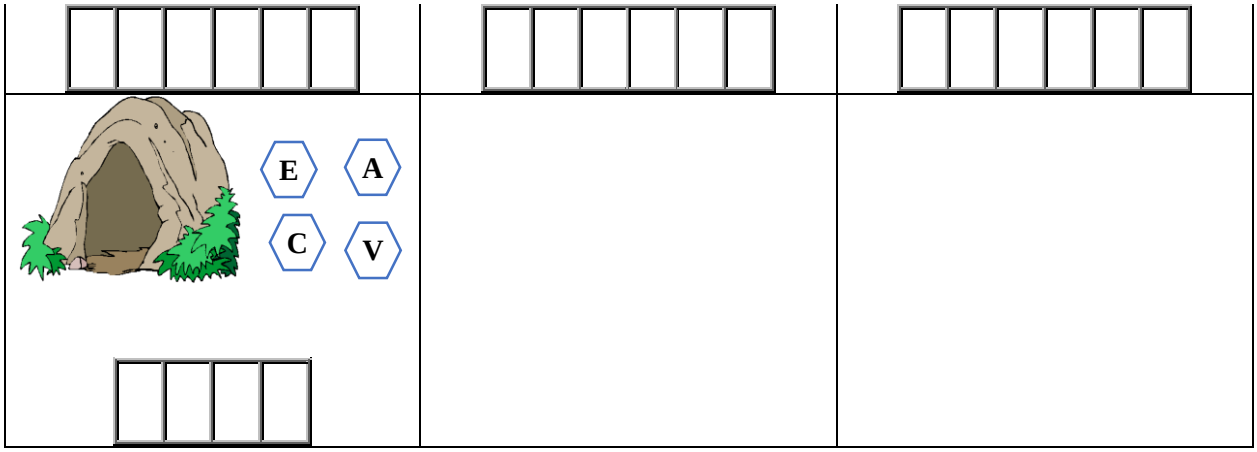
Lock ____ Capture _____Knight	_____ Fiery _____Rescue _____ Breath _____ Gently	____ Cave ____ Tower ____ Blow

1-		2-		3-		4-	
5-		6-		7-		8-	

9-		10-		11-		12-	
13-		14-		15-		16-	
17-		18-		19-		20-	

Appendix C. A sample of spelling post-test





Appendix D. The list of words used in the study

1. Planet Earth (SR) - Nouns – Nature

   Field, Marine, Heat, Rubbish, Arctic, Land, Fuel, Climate, Factory, Pesticide.
2. The Animal Shelter (SR)- Verbs-Animals

   Fetch, Carry, Bark, Hop, Skip, Wiggle, Slide, Scare, Bite, Swallow.
3. Ali and the Magic Carpet (SR) - Adjectives – Weather

   Hot, Wet, Raining, Dry, Freezing, Foggy, Windy, Dewy, Warm, Cloudy.
4. The Lazy Bear (SU)

   Asleep, Snore, Shout, Pull, Tickle, Belly, Warm, Alone, Awake, Still.
5. The Princess and the Dragon (SU)

   Capture, Lock, Tower, Knight, Rescue, Fiery, Breath, Blow, Gently, Cave.
6. No Dogs (SU)

   Gate, Towards, Bench, Over, Squeeze, Through, Ladder, Whizzed, Springy, Bounce.

Dijital hikayeler yoluyla anlam ilişkisi olan ve olmayan İngilizce kelime gruplarının çocuklara öğretimi

Öz

Yabancı dil öğreniminde kelime öğretimi, belli teknikler doğrultusunda uygun anlatım ve doğru öğretim stratejileri kullanımını gerektiren kapsamlı bir süreçtir. Bu çalışma, dijital hikayeler yoluyla çocuklara İngilizce kelimelerin anlam bütünlüğü içinde öğretiminin etkilerini araştırmak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda 6 video tabanlı İngilizce hikaye seçilmiş ve bu hikayeler sırasıyla ders materyali olarak kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, 6 hafta boyunca 25 altıncı sınıf öğrencisinin katılımıyla gerçekleşmiştir. İngilizce öğretmeni tarafından 6 hikayeden üçünde yer alan İngilizce kelimeler anlam bütünlüğü içinde ve diğer üçünde bulunan İngilizce kelimeler anlam bütünlüğü olmaksızın katılımcılara öğretilmiştir. Elde edilen öğrenim çıktılarını değerlendirmek için SPSS 20 istatistik programı kullanılmıştır. Öğrenciler kelime bilgilerinin hem anlam ilişkisi olan gruplarla hem de anlam ilişkisi olmayan gruplarla geliştirmişlerdir; ancak aralarındaki

öğrenme oranı farklıdır. Yapılan testlerde öğrenciler aralarında anlam ilişkisi bulunmayan kelime gruplarından anlam ilişkisi bulunan kelime gruplarına kıyasla daha yüksek puan almışlardır.

Anahtar sözcükler: çocuklara yabancı dil öğretimi; kelime öğretimi; anlam ilişkisi olan ve olmayan kelime grupları; dijital hikayeler

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