A GAME ACTIVITY FOR IMPROVING VOCABULARY: DESIGN, LEARN, REINFORCE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to share the design, implementation, and evaluation processes regarding an activity implemented for improving the vocabulary of 4th grade students, and to determine the opinions of the students about the activity. The activity serves to the purpose of learning the new words and phrases meaningfully through active participation. Teaching words with different semantic properties supports conceptual learning. Therefore, synonyms, antonyms, idioms, and proverbs were selected specifically. Afterwards, a game was designed, tested, and revised by the students. At the end of the game activity, all students expressed their positive opinions about the game and were eager to learn new words. Students emphasized that they had fun during the activity, participated actively, and found it exciting to create their games. According to these results, this game can be used in language lessons for enriching the content as well as the processes and products.
Keywords: teaching vocabulary, educational games, proverb, idiom.

SÖZ VARLIĞINI GELİŞTİRMEYE YÖNELİK OYUN ETKİNLİĞİ: TASARLA, ÖĞREN, PEKİŞTİR

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, ilkokul 4. sınıf öğrencilerinin söz varlığını geliştirmeye yönelik uygulanan bir etkinliğin tasarlama, uygulama, değerlendirme süreçlerini paylaşmak ve etkinlikle ilgili öğrencilerin görüşlerini belirlemektir. Etkinlikle öğrencilerin yeni kelime ve kelime gruplarını derse aktif katılımla, yaparak-yaşayarak, eğlenerek ve kalıcı bir şekilde öğrenmeleri hedeflenmiştir. Kelimelerin farklı anlamsal özellikleriyle birlikte öğretilmesi kalıcı öğrenmeyi desteklemektedir. Bu yüzden eş anlamlı kelimeler, zıt anlamlı kelimeler, deyimler ve atasözleri özellikle seçilmiştir. Öğretilmesi hedeflenen atasözü, deyim, eş ve zıt anlamlı kelimeler belirlenerek öğrencilerle birlikte bir oyun oluşturulmuş ve uygulanmıştır. Etkinlik sonunda öğrencilerin hepsi olumlu görüş bildirmiş, yeni kelime öğrenme konusunda istekli hâle gelmişlerdir. Öğrenciler; etkinlik boyunca eğlendiklerini, aktif katılım gösterdiklerini ve kendi oyunlarını oluşturmalarının farklı olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Bu sonuçlara göre geliştirilen oyun etkinliği Türkçe derslerinde içerik, süreç ve ürün zenginleştirmede kullanılabilir. Türkçe dersinin diğer konuları için de benzer oyunlar oluşturulabilir.
Anahtar kelimeler: kelime öğretimi, eğitsel oyun, atasözü, deyim.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, particularly primary and secondary school students are observed to use very few proverbs, idioms, and words in their speeches and writing activities. For students to develop their basic language skills, their vocabulary should be improved. According to Aksan (2004), vocabulary consists of the words of a language, the morphological units involved in derivation, and the elements such as compound words, idioms, proverbs, and stereotyped words. Words, proverbs, and idioms are among the most important elements of cultural heritage. Different methods, techniques, and materials can be used to transfer this heritage to future generations on a sound basis. A game, which would enable learning with fun and improve vocabulary, may attract the attention of children more. By enriching the teaching process through games, students can be encouraged to produce different and original products. Therefore, contributions could be made to the development of vocabulary of students as well as the accurate and effective use of the language, which is the basis of cultural heritage.

There is a need for educational games in order to improve the language skills of students, to increase the permanency of learning, and to enable learning by doing and having fun. Games as learning activities also increase the attention of the students towards the lesson. A literature review on using games in the learning environments revealed positive results of various research studies in this area. In his study, Özaslan (2006) investigated the effect of improving vocabulary in students through word games on their reading comprehension levels. As a result of the study, it was determined that the students in the experimental group, who played word games, scored higher in sentences, paragraphs, and overall reading comprehension levels compared to the students in the control group. In his study, Gülsoy (2013) found that educational games had a positive effect on improving the vocabulary of sixth grade students. Demirel (2015) found in his study that the intelligence game activities in Turkish lessons improved problem-solving skills and academic achievement of the sixth grade students. In their study, Batur and Yavaşça (2018) aimed to determine the contribution of

playing games with creative drama techniques to the teaching of proverbs and the permanence of learning. The findings of the study showed that students' interest and attention towards the lesson increased. It was concluded that educating and teaching students through games yields positive results for students' learning. According to Akyol (2005), in vocabulary teaching, the teaching should be structured on the previous knowledge of the students; alternative meanings of the words should be introduced through different activities; the interest of the students in the words should be ensured in the teaching process; words should be associated with the life of the students; and students should be encouraged to learn words independently. Activities that involve word games, puzzles, riddles, etc. should be implemented to improve the passive vocabulary of the students. In order to improve active vocabulary, learning environments that enable students to use their passive vocabulary should be designed (Çeçen, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to share the design, implementation, and evaluation processes regarding an activity implemented for improving the vocabulary of the fourth grade primary school students, and to determine the opinions of the students about the activity. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:
1. What are the processes of designing, implementing, and evaluating a game for improving the vocabulary of the fourth grade primary school students?
2. What are the opinions of the fourth grade students about the game?

PLANNING THE ACTIVITY

The activity was designed according to the listening, speaking, and reading skills vocabulary standards as well as the standards related to writing instructions among the writing skills specified in the fourth grade Turkish language curriculum (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2019). Teaching words together with their different semantic properties supports permanent learning. Therefore, synonyms, antonyms, idioms, and proverbs were selected specifically. It was essential to teach the correct spelling, pronunciation, and usage of the specified words and phrases together. The draft of the

activity was submitted for expert opinion and corrections were made according to the suggestions.

The curriculum standards (MoNE, 2019) related to the activity are as follows:

> T.4.1.4. Students can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words in what they listen to/watch.
> T.4.2.1. Students use the words in their meanings.
> T.4.3.7. Students can find the antonyms of words.
> T.4.3.8. Students can find the synonyms for words.
> T.4.3.11. Students understand the contribution of idioms and proverbs to the meaning of the text.
> T.4.3.12. Students can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases using the context.
> T.4.4.2. Students write instructions for the processing steps of a task.
> *Students are encouraged to prepare a leaflet describing the stages of using a tool, to prepare a booklet describing the stages of a game, or to write directions.*

ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

This activity was implemented with 10 gifted and talented students enrolled in a science and art center in Bursa in the fall semester of 2019. The implementation of the activity was completed in four lesson hours. Necessary permissions were obtained from the directorate of national education before the implementation.

Gifted and talented students are the students, who learn faster than their peers, lead in the capacity of creativity, art, and leadership, have special academic abilities, can understand abstract ideas, like to act independently in their areas of interest, and display high performance (MoNE, 2016). Enrichment activities are necessary for gifted and talented students who can get bored quickly in traditional lessons. The content, teaching process, and products should be differentiated according to the readiness, interests, abilities, and learning styles of gifted and talented students (Sak, 2017; Tomlinson, 2014; Van Tassel-Baska, 2003). The activity, designed as a game-based enrichment activity, is thought to be suitable for the gifted and talented students.

Preliminary preparations were made by the teacher and students before the activity, and the target words and phrases were identified. The target words should be age-appropriate words that students can encounter in daily life and use when expressing their feelings and thoughts. Accordingly, first of all, the literature was reviewed in terms of the previous studies and the games developed in this field. Students were given a period of one week for this study. Words, proverbs, and idioms that are frequently used and expected to be known in primary and middle schools (Aksoy, 2015) were identified; and the frequency studies related to vocabulary were examined (Çetinkaya, 2011; Karadağ, 2005; Kurudayıoğlu, 2005). The Turkish Dictionary (Turkish Language Association, 2005) was also used. At the end of the study, 21 proverbs, 21 idioms, 42 synonyms, and 34 antonyms were identified to be used in the game. At the primary schools, words and phrases with unknown meanings in the texts used in Turkish lessons could be identified; and, these words and phrases could be used for creating games at the end of the units.

Warm-up / Introduction to the Game

The teacher asked "What is the intangible cultural heritage?", "How could this intangible cultural heritage be passed on to future generations?" to the students. At this point, language was emphasized as a transmission tool for the transfer of intangible cultural heritage. The students had a whole class discussion under the guidance of the teacher. Examples of proverbs, idioms, fairy tales, jokes, and epic tales were shared.

The Learning and Teaching Process

The similarities and differences between the proverb and idiom were reminded. Moreover, different meanings, synonyms, and antonyms of words were emphasized. Having a rich vocabulary was discussed in terms of its role in developing the world of emotions, thoughts, and imaginations as well as language skills. Students were told that they would design a word game collaboratively for fun and deeper learning. The game was designed as a board game for a maximum of 2-6 players.

Therefore, large numbers of students can be divided into groups and the same game could be prepared in larger amounts. In the current implementation, the students formed groups of five members. The materials were determined for 10 students. Required materials are as follows:

- two cardboards,
- 12 background cardboards in six different colors,
- 10 white background cardboard,
- scissors,
- glue, and
- a printout of words and phrases.

The students were assigned roles to develop the game and prepare the materials. Considering the group of five students, three students were assigned to prepare word frames and two students were assigned to prepare question cards. The instructions of the game were prepared together. The teacher acted as a facilitator. Word frames were created in six different colors, with 20x20 cm in size. Word frames are given in Figure 1 and the red word frame is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 1. Word Frames

Synonym words were pasted equally in two different frames. For instance; the word "prose" was pasted on the blue frame and its synonym "text" was attached to the yellow frame. The words, "prose", "synonym", "blue", and "yellow" were written on the question card. This process was repeated for all synonyms and antonyms. All words were evenly distributed in frames of six different colors. In proverbs and idioms, the sentence or

phrase was divided into two parts and each part was pasted on a word frame. For instance, the idiom "To make heavy weather of something" was written on the question card as "To make heavy…" idiom, purple and yellow. The "To make heavy..." part was pasted on the purple frame, the "...weather of something" was pasted on the yellow frame. Eighty question cards, including 21 proverbs, 21 idioms, 21 synonyms, 17 antonyms, were created in the size of 5x10 cm. Figure 3 shows examples of question cards.

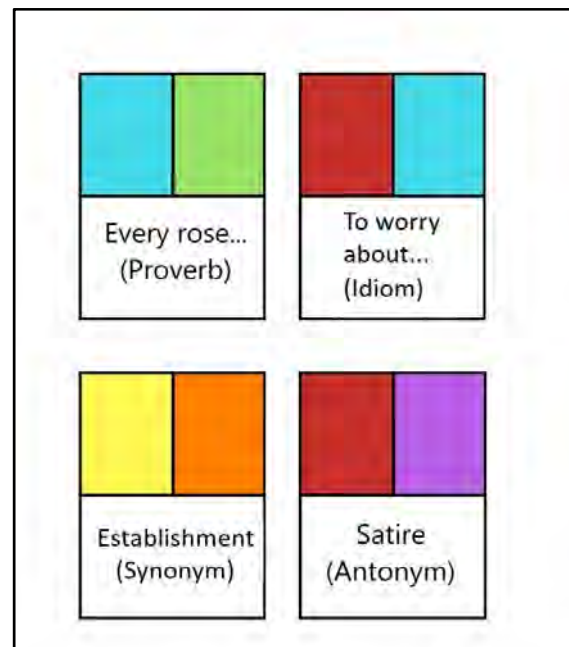**Figure 2.** Red Word Frame

Figure 3. Sample Question Cards

In the final stage, the instructions of the game were written (Figure 4, Appendix 1). The answer key of the game is given in Appendix

2. The students took active part in the preparation of the game materials and definition of the rules. The game rules and materials were revised in the process. The article describes the final version of the game. The first version of the game is given in Appendix 3. In this study, the students enriched the designed game with web 2 tools through interdisciplinary cooperation. For this purpose, word frames and question cards were re-created in digital environment, and the game was visually enriched by making colorful printouts (Figures 1-4).
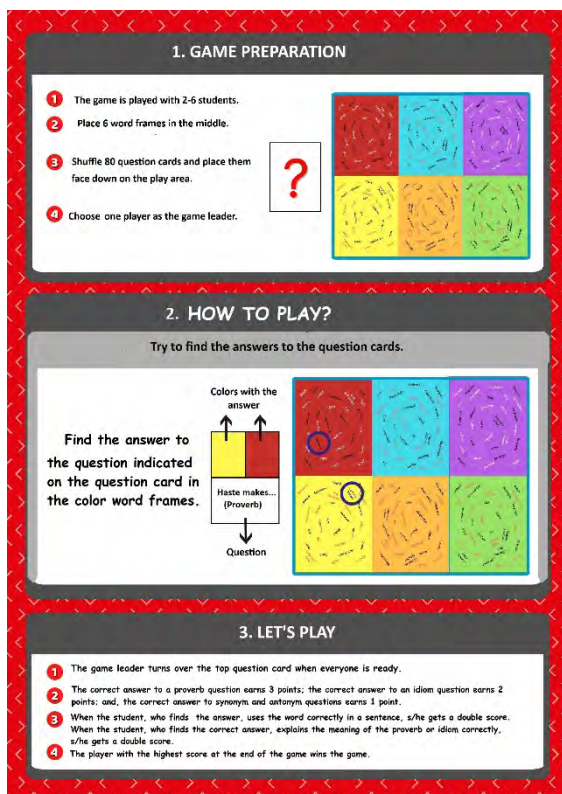
Figure 4. Game Instructions

How to Play the Game

There are six different colors of word frames and 80 question cards in the game. Question cards were placed face down in the middle of the playing area. Six double-sided word frames were placed around question cards. In the beginning of the game, one of the students was chosen as the group leader. The game started when s/he turned over the question card on the top. According to the information written on the question card, the players tried to find the relevant word from word frames. For example; the words "purpose", "synonym", "red", and "yellow" are written on one of the question

cards. For this card, the students should search the synonym of the word "purpose" on red and yellow frames. The word "purpose" is written on the red frame; and the word, "objective" is written on the yellow frame. The first to find the answer to the question gets the score of the question card. The correct answer to a proverb question earns 3 points; the correct answer to an idiom question earns 2 points; and, the correct answer to synonym and antonym questions earns 1 point. Besides, when the student, who finds the answer, uses the word correctly in a sentence, gets a double score. The game procedure is the same for the synonyms and antonyms.

A part of the sentence is given in the question cards of the proverbs. For instance; "The early bird…", "proverb", "green", and "purple" are written on one of the question cards. In this case, the "The early bird…" part of the proverb is written on the green frame; "...catches the worm" part is written on the purple frame. The question cards for the idioms are in the same format. During the game, when the student, who found the correct answer, explained the meaning of the proverb or idiom correctly, s/he got a double score. If none of the students knew the word or phrase, the teacher elicited the meaning within a context, sharing examples from the dictionaries. Then, the game continued with the next card. The player who scored the highest point won the game.

EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITY

During the activity, the teacher observed the students' participation and the learning processes to understand what learning opportunities the activity offered. The activity was implemented as planned and no problem was experienced. Some students had difficulties during the enrichment of the game with web 2 tools. At this stage, students with better computer skills can be assigned to these tasks.

It was observed that the learning environment was completely student-centered and every student participated in the activity actively. Students worked cooperatively at all stages of the game. They described the activity as fun and challenging. An image from the game is presented in Photograph 1. While preparing the game, the students had already learnt many

words and word groups. Playing the game contributed to their learning in terms of reinforcement and using the words in context. After playing the game for a few times, students' self-confidence increased and they became more eager to learn.

Photograph 1. An Image from the Game

Another observation during the game was that the students developed their vocabulary, which is one of the aims of the game, and used idioms, proverbs, and other words in accordance with their meanings. The writing assignments completed in the following months after the activity showed that the students' used the new words such as "case", "dignity", "purpose"; and idioms such as "to be fed up with something" in context correctly. They have also been using more idioms and proverbs that they learned through the game activity in their classroom conversations.

In order to answer the second research question, data about the students' views on the activity were collected. At the end of the activity, a form of open-ended questions was handed out, asking the students to evaluate the activity. The form included the following questions:

1. How would you evaluate the game in terms of improving vocabulary?
2. How difficult was the game for you? Please score between 1 and 5, with 1 meaning "it was not difficult at all" and 5 meaning "it was very difficult."
3. How fun was the game for you? Please score between 1 and 5, with 1 meaning

"it was not fun at all" and 5 meaning "it was a lot of fun."

All of the students expressed positive opinions. Students emphasized that they had fun during the activity, participated actively, and found it different to create their games. One of the students wrote "The game is fun, it is difficult to learn words from the dictionary, we learn more easily with such games, I learned new words, idioms, and proverbs; my vocabulary has improved." Another student wrote as follows:

It is a game that will improve our language skills in using words, idioms, and proverbs. There are many words and phrases that we did not know in the game and this game teaches them to you. It is entertaining at the same time.

The findings obtained regarding the difficulty and entertainment levels of the game are given in Figures 5 and 6. According to Figure 5, the mean score for the difficulty level of the game was 2.8 out of 5. Therefore, it can be argued that the game was of medium difficulty for the students. According to Figure 6, the mean score for the entertainment level was 4.3 out of 5. Therefore, it can be argued that the students found the game fun.
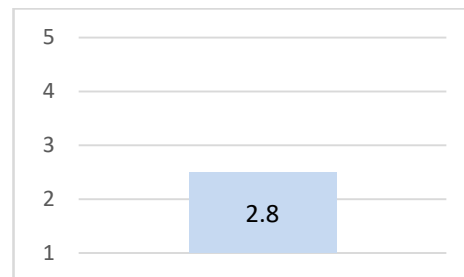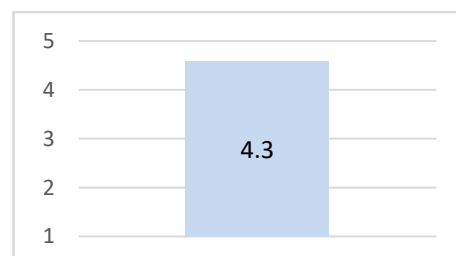

Figure 5. Difficulty Level of the Game

Figure 6. Entertainment Level of the Game

CONCLUSION and SUGESTIONS

In this study, a game-based activity was designed together with the fourth grade

students for improving their vocabulary; the game was implemented and evaluated. To answer the first research question, each stage of the activity was explained in detail. The activity was carried out as planned, and the students were very enthusiastic and active at every stage of the lesson. At the end of the activity, the opinions of the students about the activity were taken. The students expressed the view that the game improved their language skills and vocabulary; and they learned new words and phrases by having fun. Similar findings were found in the previous studies on improving vocabulary with educational games (Batur & Erkek, 2017; Batur & Yavaşça, 2018; Demirel, 2015; Gülsoy, 2013; Kıvrak, 2016; Nurlu & Sarıca, 2015; Özaslan, 2006). The results of the current study suggest that the game can be used in language lessons for enriching the content as well as the processes and products.

Gifted and talented students may experience social and emotional problems in socializing and expressing themselves (Çitil & Ataman, 2018; Peterson et al., 2009). The current experience of game development and implementation suggests that game-based activities may improve students' self-confidence, help them express themselves more comfortably, and can be effective in overcoming social and emotional problems that students may experience.

Similar games can be created for other topics of the Turkish course or other languages. Games should be at a level that allows all students to understand and participate effectively. The rules of the game should allow all students in the class to participate. Hence, educational games would provide fun and ensure conceptual learning. Traditional methods do not appeal to students and are insufficient in vocabulary teaching. On the other hand, activities based on games make the lesson enjoyable and interesting, affecting the attitudes of the students towards the lesson positively.

This activity was implemented with gifted and talented students attending the fourth grade; however, it can also be used with the fifth or sixth grade students or students attending regular middle school. Target words and phrases can be made easier or more difficult

according to the students' level. Writing activities can be integrated about the learned words at the end of the game.

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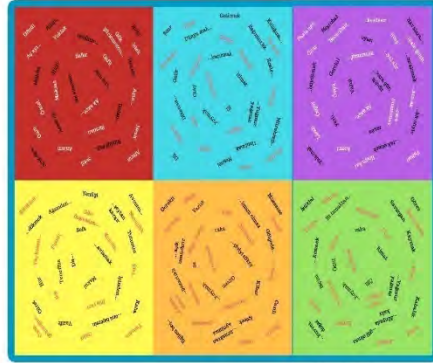
Citation Information

Appendix 1

Game Instructions

1. GAME PREPARATION
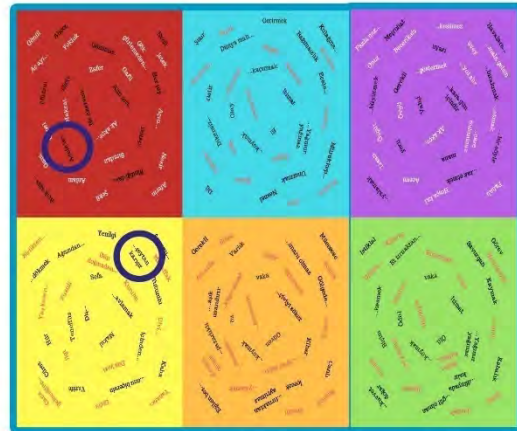
1. The game is played with 2-6 students.
2. Place 6 word frames in the middle.
3. Shuffle 80 question cards and place them face down on the play area.
4. Choose one player as the game leader.

2. HOW TO PLAY?

Try to find the answers to the question cards.

Find the answer to the question indicated on the question card in the color word frames.

Colors with the answer

Haste makes... (Proverb)

Question

3. LET'S PLAY

1. The game leader turns over the top question card when everyone is ready.
2. The correct answer to a proverb question earns 3 points; the correct answer to an idiom question earns 2 points; and, the correct answer to synonym and antonym questions earns 1 point.
3. When the student, who finds the answer, uses the word correctly in a sentence, s/he gets a double score. When the student, who finds the correct answer, explains the meaning of the proverb or idiom correctly, s/he gets a double score.
4. The player with the highest score at the end of the game wins the game.

Appendix 2

Answer Key of the Game

PROVERBS

In unity, there is strength.
Every rose has its thorns.
An open mouth never starves.
There is no rain without thunder.
A hungry stomach has no ears.
Listen before you speak.
Tomorrow is another day.
Cutting a green tree is like killing a human being.
You reap what you sow.
World property remains in the world.
Haste makes waste.
Too much coyness makes the lover bored.
Losing a belonging is better than losing your life.
Save your goods for a rainy day.
The hungry do not have mercy.
There is no cure for death.
Do not cut a head when bowed.
Two heads are better than one.
The early bird catches the worm.
Set a thief to catch a thief.
Blood is thicker than water.

IDIOMS

To become a byword
To be taught a lesson
To get educated
To spill the beans
To shoot oneself in the foot
To worry about nothing
To fly over the moon
To whistle for something
To be fed up with something
To be mealy-mouthed
To get offended with someone
To show one's teeth
To turn an honest penny
To underestimate
To lay hands on something
To mark down
To be up to something
To make heavy weather of something
To have the nerve to do something

To catch someone off guard
To rub the shine of someone

SYNONYMS

Free-independent
Task-duty
Meaning-connotation
Consciousness-Awareness
Nation-community
Drink-beverage
Form-shape
Establishment-organization
Event-case
Honor-dignity
Language-speech
Important-essential
Trust-confidence
Successful-prosperous
Interest-attention
Essential-necessary
Prose-text
Wish-desire
Liberty-independence
Warning-alert
Purpose-objective

ANTONYMS

Gentle-rude
Domestic-wild
Raw-mature
Income-expense
Bring-take away
Cheap-expensive
Victory-defeat
Master-novice
Foreign-domestic
Thrifty-wasteful
Remember-forget
Objective-subjective
Suffering-pleasure
Natural/in-law
Production-consumption
Unnecessary-necessary
Satire-praise

Appendix 3

The First Version of the Game