Using Games To Teach Spanish As A Foreign Language In One-On-One Sessions With Young Learners

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Abstract

Prior studies have highlighted the importance of games to teach a foreign language to young learners. However, there is little research on the type of games children prefer in one-on-one language tutorial sessions. As a result, this paper explores games as the instructional strategy used by some private tutors to teach Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) to children aged between eight and eleven years in Istanbul, Turkey. A case study was developed with a series of observations, journal entries, and interviews to examine the effect of games in SFL private tutoring. We analyzed the data using the inductive approach proposed by Creswell (2012) to understand the data from the SFL private tutors' perspective. The findings suggest that although games entertained children during the tutoring sessions, the degree of engagement relied on the type of game and the tutee's preferred learning style. Furthermore, there were identified attitudes towards the growth of Spanish in terms of teaching and learning in Turkey, as well as motifs and implications of becoming a SFL tutor in this country.

Key Words: *case study, games, SFL (Spanish as a Foreign Language), tutors' perceptions, private tutoring.*

Yabancı Dil Olarak İspanyolca Öğretmek İçin Oyunların Kullanılmasının Teşvik Edilmesi

Özet

Yapılan önceki çalışmalar oyunların öğretmenler açısından önemi vurgulandı. Ancak, çocukların birebir dil eğitiminde tercih ettikleri oyunlar hakkında çok az araştırma vardır. Bunun sonucunda, bu makalede, bazı özel öğretmenlerin bir yabancı dil olarak İspanyolca'yı (YDİ) çocuklara öğretmek için kullanıldıkları öğretim stratejisi oyunlarını incelenmiştir. YDİ özel ders. Elimizdeki çalışmalar, vakalar üzerinde yapılan gözlemleri, günlük kayıtları ve röportajları içermektedir. Verileri YDİ öğretmenlerinin perspektifinden anlaşılabilmesi için, Creswell (2012) tarafından önerilen endüktif yaklaşımı kullanarak analiz edildi. Bulgular, oyunların dersler sırasında çocukları eğlendirmesine rağmen, katılımın oyun türüne ve öğrencinin tercih ettiği öğrenme stiline bağlı olduğunu göstermektedir. Dahası, bu ülkede YDİ eğitmeninin gelişimine yönelik tespit edilen tutumlara yer verildi.

Key Words: *Öğretmenlerin algıları, Oyunlar, Özel Ders, Vaka çalışması, Yabancı Dil Olarak İspanyolca'ın Öğretimi (YDİ).*

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Introduction

Spanish is growing in popularity and its number of speakers worldwide (Fernández Vítores, 2018). Consequently, in Turkey, some language learners have chosen to start studying this language at school, on their own, or with a tutor. Some parents have also considered enrolling their children in Spanish courses provided by schools or with private tutorials at home. As a result, more children are taking Spanish as Foreign Language (SFL) classes outside the formal schooling context. Some of these young learners may perceive SFL tutorials as dull and uninteresting when imposed, and the long study hours that learners have at mainstream schools might affect the enthusiasm for learning the language in their spare time.

By contrast, games have been indispensable activities for children's life. Playing games is amusing and useful to foster social skills such as "negotiation, communication, group decision making, and strategic thinking," as stated by Kirriemuir and Mcfarlane (2004). Likewise, using these activities reinforces physical and mental abilities which are beneficial for a healthy body and mind.

With the aim of providing a possible solution for solving the adverse effects that SFL private tutoring may have on children when the sessions are perceived as imposed activities, we decided to include six games as a means to engage young learners in their private teaching-learning process and to observe their interest in the Spanish sessions. As part of conducting the present research, the following question arose: What are the tutors' impressions of using games to teach Spanish as a foreign language in one-on-one sessions to turkish children?

Literature Review

This section reviews recent literature on the implications of games in teaching, the expansion of Spanish as a foreign language, instructional strategies to teach a language, and the implications of shadow education, which throughout the paper will refer to private tutoring or one-on-one tutorial sessions.

Traditional Education vs. Game-Based Instruction

Learning, which is an inherent activity in children's lives, has been perceived as boring. This conception is the result of traditional methods in which the teacher is in control of the lesson, and learners are passive agents who are supposed to meet established learning goals. For instance, in traditional lessons, learners usually attend classes that are taught as lectures, and they must sit down quietly while the teacher is delivering information. Lessons are mainly teacher-centered, and learners are recipients of knowledge. Hence, as a means to tackle this

type of education and actively involve the learner in the teaching-learning process, there has been an increasing interest in using games as instructional activities. According to Zirawaga, Olusanya, and Maduku, teachers can benefit from the advantages that playing games imply since they enhance learners' experience and are supplements to the conventional instructional methods (2017, p. 55).

Additionally, traditional education methods may find it difficult to meet current learners' expectations due to new technologies and different stimuli exposure (Sardone & Devlin-Scherer, 2016), something which games can achieve. Games not only help to develop concentration, confidence, and creativity, but they are also quick activities that generate curiosity and enthusiasm. These are some of the features that learners anticipate from recent learning activities (Kirriemuir and McFarlane, 2004). In other words, games can be confidence and motivational boosters as well as engaging tools for educational settings (Al-Bulushi and Al-Issa, 2017).

Game-based instruction: teacher's and learner's roles

Game-based instruction emerged as a way to improve teaching practices focusing on a student-centered approach and reshaping the roles performed by teachers and learners in the education process. In this type of teaching, teachers and learners are dynamic agents. Kangas, Koskinen, and Krokfors (2017) claimed that the teacher's role shifts depending on the setting and instructional objectives; the teacher can be an instructor, playmaker, guide, and evaluator (Hanghøj, 2013). These roles are of high importance, and the teacher needs to know when to perform them so that the learning outcomes can be met. For instance, in a case study carried out by Marklund and Alklind Taylor (2016) on teachers working in a school in Sweden, a modified version of the game Minecraft was used for educational purposes. Researchers wanted to observe the role of the teacher when using the game in their lessons. In their findings, they reported that in an attempt to implement games in the curriculum at school, the teachers needed to be game literate. In other words, they needed to know how to play and be able to explain the games to learners to achieve learning goals. The game itself cannot teach if it is not carefully selected and adapted to meet the goals of the lesson and learners' needs and interests.

Games are pleasant activities that teachers can take advantage of as they are engaging and promote motivation. Although many learners may enjoy playing games and could know how to do it, not all are game-driven or competent at playing. Hence teachers and learners should agree upon the sort of games to employ in the lessons (Hanghøj, 2013). This agreement can

be based on the learners' range of interests, teaching and learning modalities, and instructional objectives.

Spanish Language Teaching

According to Fernández Vítores (2018), more than 577 million people speak Spanish either as a native or foreign language, and it is the second most spoken language in the world (more than 480 million people speak it as their mother tongue). On the internet, it is the third most used language. Furthermore, it is the second preferred language on Facebook and Twitter.

As of today, Spanish learning is increasing and has become the fourth foreign language most studied worldwide. There are more than 21 million learners in about 107 countries. The main cause of this growth is the rise in trade between Spanish-speaking countries and the rest of the world. It is foreseen that, by 2050, it will be the most spoken language.

In Turkey there are approximately 1,000 native Spanish speakers and 8,000 users of Spanish, including Judeo-Spanish speakers (Fernández Vítores, 2018). Moreover, after the opening of the Cervantes Institute in 2001 in Istanbul, more people are interested in studying this language. Additionally, even though English has been the preferred foreign language taught in formal schools in this country, followed by French or German, Spanish has begun to be included in the curriculum of some schools.

Language instructional strategies

Lewis-Moreno (2002) proposed some strategies that language teachers can utilize with the aim of facilitating learning. Among these strategies are: adapting teaching style to learners' style, helping learners to adjust to the environment where learning takes place, displaying visuals, speaking clearly, modeling when correcting mistakes, developing graphic organizers, brainstorming, having learners maintain a notebook, using multimedia (videos and music), and hands-on activities such as crafts, games, and experiments in which learners could use realia and manipulatives. Most of these strategies were thought to be used in the language classroom; nevertheless, they can be adopted in private tutoring to enhance the teaching-learning experience and promote imagination and creativity in children (Asensio Pastor, 2016), aspects that tutors may benefit from when having private sessions.

Private tutoring

During the last decades, private tutoring has become a global phenomenon that resembled mainstream education. It is also known as shadow education because, as Bray and Kwo

(2014) explained, it is a type of education that shadows formal education to complement learners' academic performance through lessons out-of-school context in exchange for a fee.

The expansion of shadow education around the world has been partly caused by low salaries earned by some teachers at formal schools. Those teachers opt to teach privately as a way to have higher incomes (Bray & Kwo, 2014; Chui, 2016). Another explanation of this phenomenon is the concern of some parents about their children's success in the short and long term. Those parents believe that private tutoring is a way to ensure higher scores in schools and college admissions (Buchmann, Condron, & Roscigno, 2010).

According to Hajar (2018), private tutoring has tangible and intangible benefits on learners. Some hard benefits include an appropriate learning atmosphere, tailored sessions focused on improving academic deficiencies, and exam-orientated sessions. Regarding the soft benefits, they could be the development of self-esteem and social skills, and willingness to learn as a consequence of the strategies used by the tutor.

Additionally, Šťastný (2017) points out that flexibility when arranging sessions is an asset that benefits not only learners but also tutors. Bray (2014) states that shadow education allows the expansion of knowledge regarding topics not covered at school. Furthermore, he adds that low level learners might keep up with their classmates, while fast learners may enhance abilities in which they excel.

On the teacher's side, some other benefits include small size lessons and autonomy to design lessons focused on the learners' needs. Owing to the fact that sessions are usually one-on-one, difficult discipline situations are less common. Likewise, the teacher-tutor could exploit his or her knowledge of teaching to approach the learner's preferred learning style and build rapport. Parents or guardians are also helped by private tutorials since the tutor could perform the role of a carer when they are not nearby (Bray & Kwo, 2014).

Shadow education could promote inequality, anxiety, and affect the quality and credibility of mainstream education (Bray & Kwo 2014; Buchmann et al., 2010; Hajar, 2018). Privileged students can have access to private tutoring, which leaves low-income learners without the possibility to compete fairly with their peers. It also generates anxiety on learners if they do not get the high scores their parents are expecting them to or are not competent at the desired subject. It can also produce burnout on learners and teachers due to long hours of study or work (Bray & Kwo, 2014, pp. 2-3).

Method

This study follows the qualitative interpretative research paradigm. Its main aim is to describe the problem in order to understand it, and the interpretation is the result of the researcher's judgment and perspective towards the emerging themes and categories (Creswell, 2012, p. 238). The phenomenon described is the use of games in SFL private tutoring sessions with Turkish children in Istanbul.

Case Study

Case studies have been a long established methodology in education research to present a detailed analysis of an entity of interest. The essential goal of case study research is to comprehend the problem from the participants' point of view through an extensive analysis of the problem in context (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). Hence, being a participant-observer and interviewing peer SFL tutors was an effective way to examine and understand the effectiveness of games to instruct young learners in SFL.

Setting and Participants

The present investigation was carried out in Istanbul, Turkey, with SFL private tutors. Homogenous sampling was implemented to select the participants (Creswell, 2012). The criteria for choosing the subjects were as follows: tutors who spoke Spanish as a native language, English as a second language, and were tutoring children in their mother tongue. The three participants had lived in Istanbul for at least one year and had been teaching Spanish privately for more than six months. The tutorials usually took place after school hours or on weekends in different parts of the city.

This section has explained how the sample was selected and its importance in the study. The section that follows moves on to consider the methodology, instruments employed to gather data, and the method used to analyze and interpret it.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three sources were used in the present study to gather information: field notes, a reflective journal, and interviews (conducted on peer SFL tutors). This variety of sources permits the tutor-researcher to follow the triangulation practice, in which data would converge and lead to the same findings (Yin, 2016, p.160).

In the first type of data collection, the tutor performed an active role by being a participant-observer. In this role, the tutor recorded three observations and three reflective journals. The

second type of data consisted of interviews administered on peer SFL private tutors that were teaching in different parts of Istanbul.

The field notes were taken during the last twenty minutes of three selected sessions as follows: at the beginning (on week two), in the middle (on week seven), and at the end of the intervention (on week fourteen). The information documented corresponded to the children's behaviors, attitudes, and comments towards the use of games during the Spanish tutorial sessions.

Secondly, the reflective journal entries comprised the tutor's feelings, a description of the implementation of the games during the intervention, the tutees' reactions while using the games, and topics to reinforce and improve in the coming sessions.

Finally, the SFL tutors were reached to carry out one-on-one interviews regarding their opinions on the use of games, the role of Spanish in Turkey, and their thoughts on private tutoring. The interviews consisted of a questionnaire with 13 questions that included closed-ended and open-ended questions. The former type of questions can gather useful information to support theories and concepts in the literature, while the latter type of questions allows the researcher to explore reasons for the closed-ended responses and identify further comments participants might have (Creswell, 2012).

After the data gathering process, its analysis and interpretation were done inductively using the bottom-up approach proposed by Creswell (2012). With this model, the tutor-researcher could go back and forth in the different stages of the analysis to gain a deeper understanding. These are the steps followed:

1.   The tutor-researcher gathers data.

2.   The tutor-researcher organizes the data (transcriptions).

3.   The tutor-researcher examines the data.

4.   The tutor-researcher codes and assigns labels.

5.   The tutor-researcher determines descriptions or themes to include in the report.

Games Used in the Intervention

Before the intervention started, the tutor carried out a diagnosis activity to determine the children's level of proficiency in Spanish, and the results showed that they were at a A1 level. Likewise, parents expressed their concern about focusing on speaking so that children would

be able to communicate. As a consequence, the first four games were chosen to reinforce the following topics: the alphabet, family members, parts of the house, and colors and numbers. The aim of the last two games was focused on the children's oral production in the target language.

Hangman (Spelling game)

During the SFL session, this game aimed to use the Spanish alphabet and practice the spelling of 27 words that the tutor introduced at the beginning of the lesson. Hangman is a paper-and-pencil game that usually has two players: an executioner and a guesser. The executioner is in charge of selecting a word and drawing dashes based on the number of letters that the chosen word has; meanwhile, the guesser calls letters out to find out the selected word. When the guesser predicts a letter correctly, the executioner adds that letter in the dashes. The executioner draws the parts of the stick man based on the wrong guesses; each wrong letter represents a part in the stick man.

UNO card game (Vocabulary game)

Firstly, the cards of this game were used to explain colors and numbers, and then the learner was asked to sort them out based on their color and number. After that, the tutee had to shuffle the cards and deal them out to play. The game's objective was to be the first player that got rid of all the cards in their hand.

Family members tic–tac–toe (Oral production game)

The tic-tac-toe grid that the tutor used in the intervention (see Figure. 1) was an adapted version with nine family members of the game presented by Seymour and Popova (2003, p. 25). To mark a square with X or O, each player chose a symbol and took turns to talk for 20 seconds about one of the members in the grid. When it was a player's turn to speak, the other player assessed the oral production to decide if the selected square could be taken. In order to win, the player X or O had to draw the corresponding symbol in three squares horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

Mamá	Papa	Hermano

Hermana	Tía	Tío
Abuela	Abuelo	Primos

Figure 1. Family members tic-tac-toe grid

The Post-it game - a minute to win (vocabulary game)

This game was used to introduce vocabulary related to the house. Rooms, and the most common objects found within them were included. Before playing the game, the target vocabulary was written on Post-it notes and stuck on the different places and objects of the house. Once the tutor and learner had practiced the vocabulary, the tutor removed the notes from the assigned places and shuffled the words. Afterward, the tutee had one minute to place the notes back in the right places. The tutee played several rounds until all the notes were in the right places.

Paper fortune teller (Oral production game)

This traditional origami game was adapted to practice greetings and introductions. In each one of the eight flaps, there was a question related to the days of the week, greetings, age, name, favorite music, favorite animal, best friend, and favorite subject.

Knock 'em down (Oral production game)

Before the session, 15 questions were prepared related to all the topics seen during the sessions. The game consisted of arranging ten plastic cups, as illustrated in Figure 2, and with a ball, trying to knock them all. In order to knock down the cups, the tutee had to answer the questions correctly. Each correct answer was a chance to shoot.
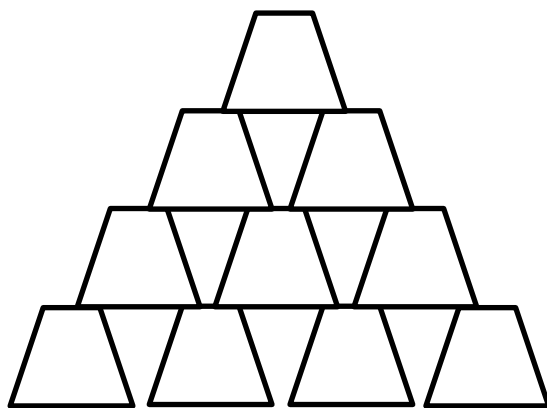
Figure 2. Knock 'em down cups pile

Results and Discussion

The current study aimed to illustrate the effectiveness of games to teach SFL through private tutoring to children aged 8 – 11 years old in Istanbul. Resulting from the inductive analysis, the following themes were identified.

Levels of Attention

The reflective journal entries and the field notes revealed that the tutees lacked motivation at the beginning of the sessions. This finding suggested that since the tutor was replicating formal schooling lessons, and the tutee was exhausted from school hours and extracurricular activities, the tutee's level of attention was minimal. This outcome can be supported by Chui who affirmed that private tutoring could cause exhaustion due to long studying schedules (2016, p. 198).

The flow of the session turned out to be more pleasant when the tutor implemented the games. This result is contrary to that of Chui (2016), who claimed that private tutoring does not allow tutees time for playing and enjoyment.

Additionally, in the interviews, it was demonstrated that the preferred instructional strategy used by SFL tutors to teach young language learners was hands-on activities. The informants reported that in an attempt to make the most of a session with young learners, it was crucial to use activities such as experiments, crafts, or games since tutees are usually engaged. According to Mayda (2015), when teachers actively involve learners in their own learning, including relevant aspects of the learner's lives, such as needs and interests, those aspects can be a catalyst for meaningful learning.

The Spanish tutors also confirmed that games entail a variety of benefits. Playing games permitted the tutee to be at ease, acquire the language faster without the fear of being assessed, and the sessions tend to be more enjoyable. All the participants agreed that games are an enticing and fun way to teach SFL. This finding is consistent with that of Hajar (2018) in which games were found to be the entertaining factor in tutorials with year six children to help them pass a school admission exam in the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, as noted by Marklund and Alklind Taylor (2016), games could involve significant benefits when carefully chosen based on learners' preferences and learning outcomes. In this regard, the participants mentioned that not all games are entertaining, due to factors such as age, level of difficulty, personalities, and learning styles. Hence it is vital to consider first these factors when choosing a game.

Paper and Pencil Games vs. Games with Manipulatives

After the implementation of the six games, we could identify two main categories a) Paper-and-pencil games which include hangman, paper fortune teller, and tic-tac-toe, and b) games with manipulatives such as UNO card game, knock 'em down, and the post-it game.

The former type of games was appealing during the first minutes of the implementation, although the level of excitement started to decrease after 15 minutes of playing them. Conversely, the latter type was more engaging, and the tutees' interest remained steady. It was evident that children enjoyed games that involve movement and the manipulation of objects. As Şener and Çokçalışkan (2018) stated, learners who make use of manipulatives to explore and grasp understanding are kinesthetic. Henceforth, the variation of enthusiasm between paper-and-pencil games and games that involve manipulatives indicated that the tutees were kinesthetic learners.

Spanish Teaching Perceptions

Two participants commented that the main reason for the rise of Spanish teaching-learning in Turkey is because of the increase in business between Turkey and Spanish-speaking countries. One of the participants also mentioned that Spanish was displacing French, which some years ago it was regarded as the country's high society language. These opinions agreed with Navarro Carrascosa (2017) and Fernández Vítores (2018), who declared that the increase of Spanish learning is due to the expansion of Spanish-speaking economies and the fall in popularity of French.

Private Tutoring Perceptions

Concerning the perception of private tutoring, the informants reported that the primary motive for becoming tutors was the economic benefits it involved. This finding also accorded with Bray and Kwo (2014), Chui (2016), and Šťastný (2017), who declared that teachers become private tutors to have higher incomes that supplement their salaries from mainstream schools.

All of the participants had the same opinion on what a tutor does. They commented that tutors are instructors who facilitate and support language learning, who could also be models of their cultures. Additionally, one participant pointed out that the tutor could also perform the role of a nanny when parents are busy, which agreed with Bray and Kwo (2014) statement about the tutor also being a caretaker when the tutees' parents are not around.

As we predicted, interviewees admitted that the effects of private tutoring directly influence teachers and learners; hence, the benefits surpass the disadvantages (Subedi, 2018). This result may be determined by the range of advantages that private tutoring conveys on the tutor side (see Table 1).

Table 1. Interviewees' perceptions on private tutoring

Advantage	Disadvantage
Extra earnings	Young tutees' reluctance (Parents pressure)
Avid language learners	Time: commuting and planning
Non-habitual	
Small class-size.	
Personalized sessions	
Comfortable environment	
Rapport is built easily	

These are some comments from the interviewee's point of view regarding the advantages and the disadvantages of private tutoring:

(P1) I think that private tutoring was a great help when I was not earning enough at a primary school; it helped me to supplement what I was earning monthly. Additionally, tutoring allows us to identify difficulties that can be hard to spot in larger classes. Tutoring one student is beneficial for the teacher and the student, the instruction is personalized, and the students have the comfort of being at home, a place where they can feel relaxed.

(P2) I like it when learners are interested in and committed to learning Spanish. There is a wide variety of topics to discuss, mainly with adults, so the lessons flow smoothly. On the other hand, tutoring children can sometimes be negative when their parents are forcing them to take the lessons, or they are tired when getting home from school or activities they have to attend after classes. When it happens, I try to look for fun activities that engage them in the session.

(P3) I find it difficult going from one place to another when the teaching hours at the school are over, the commute in Istanbul at rush hours is chaotic. There are a lot of traffic jams. The positive aspect of that [sic] is that every lesson is unique.

Conclusion

To conclude, the findings in the current study determined that despite children's reluctance to take private lessons after long school hours, they were more engaged in SFL private tutorials when the tutors make use of games. By using hands-on activities such as games, the tutors and learners can build sound relationships, have appealing lessons, and encourage young learners to be at ease and use the target language. However, it is crucial to consider that not all games are equally enjoyable to young learners. The tutor is responsible for selecting the game that best fits the learners' preferred modality of learning and interests while meeting the desired learning outcomes. Based on these results, we suggest language tutors including games in their sessions to capture learners' attention and make them feel involved in their own learning experience.

Furthermore, since private tutoring is a phenomenon that is growing worldwide, tutors could take advantage of the positive influence of games to expand their teaching repertoire, and have enticing sessions that facilitate the instruction of different areas of learning. The use of games as instructional strategies will benefit not only private language tutors but also teachers who are looking for tactics to enhance their expertise.

We can also conclude that Spanish is gaining strength in terms of teaching and learning in Turkey due to rising economies and the number of Spanish speakers in the country. We can predict that in the following years, there will be more SFL tutors required in the country to supply the demand of Spanish learning.

Finally, keeping in mind that the data in this study were gathered and analyzed employing a small sampling, the study could be replicated with a larger sample to confirm the results obtained. Additionally, as we focused on the tutors' perceptions, a further study focusing on the learners' attitudes might be of significant contribution. It would contrast and support the findings of this research.

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