

Using Wordscapes Game as a Tool to Develop EFL Learners' Vocabulary Repertoire

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Abstract

The most vital part of our lives nowadays is technology. It has changed our lives in many ways. It makes life well-situated for us. At the present time, young people are more expected to be seen playing video games. Some assume that movies, TV, and video games are a bad influence on kids, and they hold responsible on these media for causing different problems. Supposed negative effects such as addiction, increased aggression, and various health consequences such as obesity and repetitive strain injuries tend to get far more media coverage than the positives. While there are some negatives on playing video games, there's no denying that they stop us from getting outside. There are also some benefits. Surprisingly, playing video games can help our physical, mental, and emotional health. A growing number of researchers believed that if used in the right way, video and computer games have the potential to inspire learning. And they can help players improve organization and visual skills.

Thus, when learning is channeled into an enjoyable game, they are very often willing to invest considerable time and effort in playing it. Moreover, in view of diverse learning styles and preferences the students display, benefits from games seem to cater for everyone as learners find playing activities much richer language studying work than doing other kinds of practice. If games are properly designed, they may become an excellent and essential part of a learners' learning programme. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that games like any other activity or tool can be overused when exploited too much so that the motivating element disappears rapidly.

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ABSTRACT

Playing games such as puzzle games, word search, crosswords, mix and matching, scrabble, etc. are brain motivating problems that test one's creativity. These games increase brain power which makes them a proper choice for use in educational purposes besides just providing mere entertainment. They educate, improve your intelligence proportion, improve your cognitive ability, improve your concentration, develop motor skills, improve your problem solving skills, improve productivity and can improve your social skills.

The most preferred game at the moment is the game developed by People Fun! named "WordScapes". The game starts with easy puzzles and becomes challenging. There are over 800 puzzles in this game which is really astonishing. Despite the fact that, the developers call it up-to-the-minute word game, it's quite regular word games. In addition, not too much only one of its kind like *Alpha Swipe* or *Under a Spell*. But, it's really pleasurable and one of the most addicting word puzzle game.

In addition to the distraction significance of games, they have great didactic latent. Games exclusively intended to deal with a specific problem such as developing learners' vocabulary repertoire or teach a specific skill have been very successful, in particular because they are motivating, engaging, interactive, and provide rewards and strengthening to improve.

Key Words: wordscapes game, vocabulary repertoire, foreign language .

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1. Introduction:

To let learners use physical play, be active or motivated, master or practicing words or animating pictures put on walls or screens, "Wordscape Game" is the appropriate space or environment for learning such. In other words, the concentration will be on the factor of playing with words and letter forms. Motivation is available in this game that can help learners developing their language skills. They can interact, explore, manipulate words individually or collaboratively with each others.

Alongside with the traditional methods, such as (drawing, painting, playing), wordscape game uses new technology in order to ensure the literacy learning of the learners. Changes in typographical elements of the story and learners' interaction can be picked up by the sensors of sound and movement. It gives visual/sound clues about the meaning of specific words. It makes images appear, music play,....etc.(Blaney & McComish, 2015)

Away from the use of computer screen, TV set, boards or games, this game help learners to have active and interactive physical play. It provides learners with fun and motivation that make them return to play the game again. As it is new and exciting, it develops and enhance learners' social and words skills. Wordscape game can be considered as a mixture of literacy learning, physical play, and the language. It enhances the teaching of phonics, alliteration, visual/sound clues as well as repetition.(ibid)

2. Aims of the Study:

1.The present study aims at identifying the importance of using 'wordscapes Game' in developing EFL learners Repertoire through reviewing the implications of it on language learning and teaching.

2.To show its parts, levels, scales, characteristics, steps, and the way that may help EFL learners in the future to develop their vocabulary repertoire through applying and playing this impressive game with all its aspects.

3. Definition of Basic Terms:

3.1 Wordscapes Game: is a game developed by 'People Fun Inc' and is a big hit with most players. It is a game where you get a variety of letters and you have to make as many words possible out of them. (Thorp, 2018 : 1)

Wordscapes is a brain challenging fun game which is made with the combination of word search and crosswords.(Sandford et.al, 2006: 40-41)

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3.2 Vocabulary Repertoire: as noted by Finch (2000: 102) “ it can be seen as an all words of a given language or an internal knowledge possessed by speakers of that language.”

Vocabulary can be also defined as “ the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. A useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary ‘items’ rather than ‘words’ (Ur, 2003: 60).”

4. Literature Review:

The present study is representing some examples that are considering with using games in teaching and learning vocabulary in English as a foreign language:

4.1 Riahipour and Saba (2012) stated that there are some activities such as memorizing a list of words, derivations, fill in the blanks considered to be un-interesting for the learners. Besides, using such words and translating them make no assurance that learners can remember all these words and their derivations. Learning will be more enjoyable and valuable when using games to learn vocabularies. It helps learners maintaining words so fast.

4.2 Yildirim (as cited in Donmus, 2010, p.1498) suggested that “Educational games are activities that provide students the opportunity to reinforce the previous knowledge by repeating it in a more comfortable environment”.

4.3 Donmus (2010) suggests a study about using games that are educational and supported with social networks. This study dealt with foreign language education. The results showed that learners can get beneficial learning through using face-book games continuously. This way can motivate and help learners to assemble their own learning. He also pointed that physical and mental capacity of learners can be seen through playing these games.

4.4 Alemi (2010:425-438) This study is an attempt to investigate the effect of using games in expanding learners vocabularies. The researcher used five games that related to teach words, such as (Twenty Questions, Charades, Definition Game's, Passwords, and Crossword Puzzles). The sample of the study was selected randomly from male/female group of third grade/Junior high school learners. It is divided into two groups: Experimental and control. The control group were taught words with traditional methods, the experimental group were taught through games as a treatment. Finally, a test of vocabularies was made for both groups to identify the difference between

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them. The results showed that there is a positive effect for these games on expanding learners' vocabulary repertoire.

4.5 Kalaycioglu (2011) This study shows the effects of the educational games on the preschool-level English vocabulary learning of four years olds. The sample of this study were 33 male/female preschool learners who were four years old. The experiment takes over four weeks, 24vocabulary items were presented with picture cards by using Total Physical Response (TPR) Method to both groups. The results showed that there is a significant difference in the achievement of the experimental group who were taught through using picture vocabularies game. Also the gender effect on acquiring vocabularies of English was investigated for both groups.

4.6 Demirbilek, Yilmaz and Tamer (2010:720) This study is about the instructors' attitudes towards the use of educational games in second language learning at the graduate level. Semi-constructed interviews were used to collect data. The sample of the study was 11 instructors from the School of Foreign Languages at a university located on the South West of Turkey. After the statistical treatment, the result showed that using computer games as a tool may affect the implementing of this tool in the class, characteristics of the game, and learners and instructors' attitudes towards the use of such games. It can be changed from game-based learning to learners-centered learning the process of learning can be more easier, interesting and effective.

5. Teaching Vocabulary

We should pay attention to some of the elements of English language such as: pronunciation, spelling, structure, and vocabulary. When we teach vocabulary to EFL learners, it is a must to know a list of vocabularies of the language by learners so that they can master it.(Linse, 2005).

Cameron (2001) comments that learners need to know thousands of words and their meaning in order to speak and write the language well.

5.1 How can Vocabulary be Learned?

It is best to use labeling and categorizing when learning to speak. EFL learners can compose complex ideas and develop them when using network process. Learners can be aware of other types of vocabularies that can be divided into antonyms, synonyms, and other things. Another way to teach EFL learners English vocabularies is real objects that enable learners to visualize later any vocabulary of the language as well as repeat these words after listening to their teachers.(Thornbury, 2002) Besides, there is the direct method where mother tongue is used but no translation is available. Only one type of sentences is used in the classroom which is the complete sentence in

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the target language. Finally, total physical response can also be a good choice for its using for a variety of games and activities included in this method that make a lot of teachers use it for it enables learners to communicate through communicative language approach where meaning in context is stressed.(ibid,2001)

5.2 Teaching Vocabulary by Using Games

Halliwell (1991) argued that teachers and learners have to be provided with an atmosphere which related to communicative skills so that they can express their ideas or feelings well. Moreover, learners must be encouraged by teachers to construct words of the language by their own to communicate because they can't predicate the activity of the language used. Here where the importance and usefulness of using games lies.

Games are not only fun, but they are also enable learners to create words, ideas and communicate desirably and predictably. In addition, teachers need to be trained in order to use games for teaching vocabulary for EFL learners. They can teach them how to play and master the linguistic parts of the language.(ibid)

Rixon (1981) pointed that to find out and create games by teachers requires understanding these games well so learners can learn while playing.

5.2.1 What is a Game?

Jones (1980) stated that in playing a game, one or more learners can play, complete and cooperate according to rules of the game.

Rogers (1981) said that gaming is a goal, rule and competition that need to be defined and governed to let learners engage with each other closely.

Gibbs (1981) defined games as an activity that can be implemented through cooperation, completion, and decision-makers who want to make their objectives came true. Such games require using the language and its patterns by the learners while they are playing which will help in developing and improving their skills.(ibid, 1981)

5.2.2 Importance of Games in Teaching Vocabulary to EFL Learners

Lewis (1999) stated that as learners like to play, games are familiar among them. Through using games, those learners could interact, discover, and experiment with their surroundings. Using games not only increase learners' motivation, but also provide stimulation to use the language.

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Harmer (2008) stated that in order to have the ability to speak English fluently, young learners need to have the ability to know the language features and to process information immediately. Therefore, young learners must practice through variety and appropriate techniques that aid their information process and simultaneous operations of the language.

According to Allen (1983), games are important in teaching vocabulary because they highlight the necessary and important words to achieve the objectives of the game.

Huyen Ang Nga, (2003) and Uberman, (1998) agreed that games create a fun and relaxed atmosphere where young learners could learn fast and retain words better.

Vernon (2009) argued that games are an effective tool to teach vocabulary to young learners. Learners participate and pay more attention because they enjoy themselves and the classroom and feel and do better during and after the game. Repetition will be less boring and fun for children to which consolidates their learning of new words.

Furthermore, by involving physical-movements in games, young learners will be alert and stimulated. Young learners often get impatient and bored very quickly if they attend lessons for a long period, so involving physical movements every now and then will guarantee their participation. Games that involve learners to take part in a healthy competition could help them in learning more without forcing their participation. Thus, choosing the right game can support healthy competition in the classroom.(ibid)

5.2.3 Implications to Use Games in Teaching Vocabulary

5.2.3.1 The Implementations of Using Vocabulary Games

The following steps should be put in consideration during the use of games in teaching vocabulary to EFL learners by the teachers:

-Grouping Technique

It is important to make learners sit together and in groups due to they can be motivated when they found their peers around them. It encourages them to cooperate with each other for any task. Grouping should not be permanent, i.e. not making groups all the time while they are working (Scott & Ytreberg 2004) .

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Phillips (1993) mentioned that a group must have more than five members in order to have productive results. Members of a group could choose a name for their group and to be written on the board for recording their scores. As a matter of creating a cooperative and a competitive atmosphere among the members of all groups, there is an uneven number of learners in an group, i.e. if one group have five learners, another could have three only, in this case grouping technique will be helpful.

- Giving Explanation and Instruction

It is so useful to explain the steps and instructions of the game for the learners by the teachers at the beginning so that teachers can achieve the aimed results from implementing the game. It is also important for the learners to understand how to play and practice on a list of vocabularies that intended to be learned, so the role of the teacher must be identified in the classroom as an integral part when teaching vocabulary by using games. If these instructions are not explained firstly, using games to teach vocabulary will be a waste of time for the class. The process will end with no outcomes and learners will get bored so fast.

6. Applying and Reviewing Wordscapes Game:

6.1 Participants:

For the present study, 62 male and female second stage college students from Mustansiriyah University / College of Basic Education / Department of English Language selected from section A and B to be the sample of this study for the academic year 2018-2019.

6.2 Applying Wordscapes Game in the Classroom:

The participants were asked first to download the mentioned game on their phones and bring a notebook for each one of them so that they can write down the new vocabularies they create from the wordscape game and try to check the meaning and derivation of each words acquired through using this game from the dictionary if possible. The idea lies behind having a notebook is to make use of each words written in the puzzles in any situation or skill of English language, besides this notebook will be considered as a mini dictionary for the learners themselves. This procedure is controlled and monitored by the researcher herself to make sure that learners are really activating. The participants were divided into groups named by the participants themselves with different names in order to create the factor of competition among the participants and to take into account the time factor required for each level. The time in this game is not specified, it is opened,

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but the need to try this application in the classroom must be set a specific time to complete the levels displayed.

6.3 Reviewing of Wordscape Game:

The game has a 5-star rating on both the App Store and Google Play. Wordscapes is enjoyed by audiences from 8 and up some comments reading “This is a great game to get learners thinking about vocabulary and spelling.” (Thorp, 2018 : 3)



People Fun Inc has made a variety of games including Wordscapes uncrossed which takes away the crossword aesthetic from the original game. It is thought that many people will enjoy this game with the challenges it brings. I like it because the puzzles aren't impossible and you learn from it, too.

The game-play is simple. You have to make words using given alphabets. Actually, you have to make lots of words using same letters on one level. To make words, swipe your fingers from one letter to another to make a word. If you create a correct word, it will fill the puzzle boxes automatically, and then you have to make another word. Sounds easy, right? But, not always. Harder levels are really too much challenging. You need to pay concentration to complete levels faster. But if you stuck somewhere, you can use Hints. Visually, Wordscapes is 2D. The graphics are good enough as well as

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colourful. The game is very comprehensible that you can easily handle it. Music and sound are also cool, but you can mute them in the Settings folder.



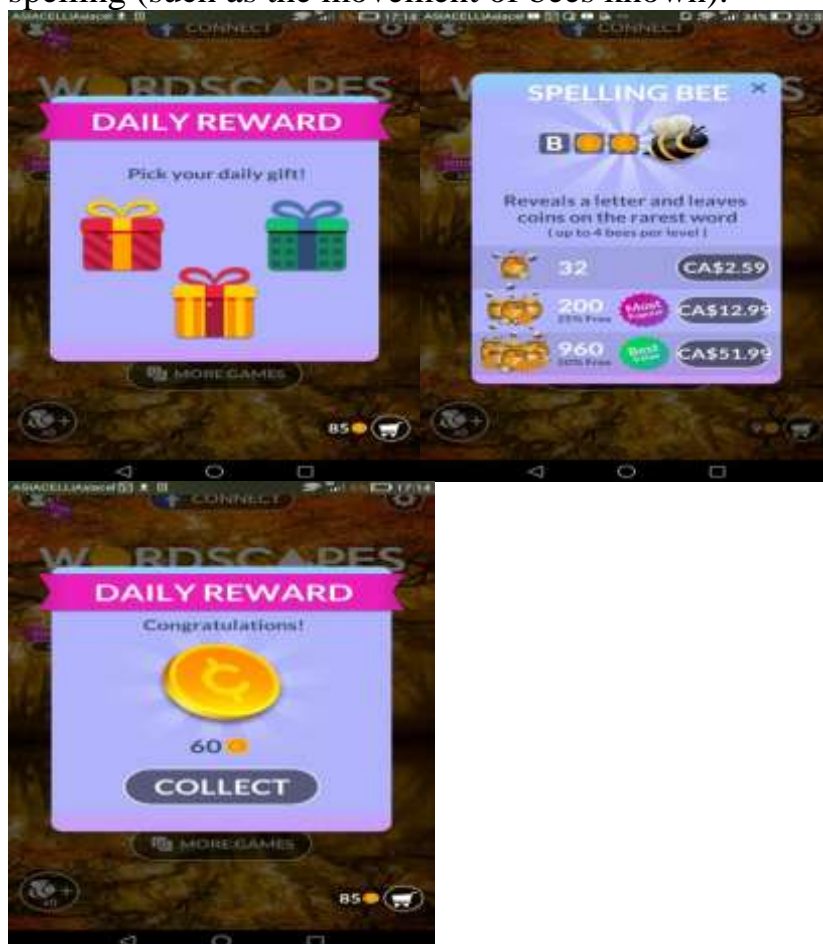
If the player (the learner) adds a new word that is not in the scope of the puzzle, that word is counted as a bonus and stored in the bonus box indicated by a star within a small circle. It is worth mentioning that the bonus part where something useful for the player (the learner) is the existence of derivation and interpretation of the innovative word from the player (the learner) and clarify with an example and give a synonym for the word as well .. etc. This is a really useful aspect for developing learners' skills and increasing their vocabulary repertoire.



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At the beginning of each range or level daily award chosen by the player (learner) such as extra money needed by the player to buy some assistance in the future when passing higher levels within the game, and this money can also be obtained from watching some of the videos or ads that appear on the screen. The other gifts are either an arrow that starts at the top of the hidden character in the column in the game range or a rocket that launches when clicked. The first letters of some difficult and critical words appear difficult for some (educated) players to guess. When you continue playing, you will discover another method or technique that helps to identify some of the characters in the columns and lines of the domain and randomly called bee spelling (such as the movement of bees known).



There is also the scrambled letters in the same circle that contains the proposed letters for the puzzle. Sometimes flipping the letters helps to guess or know the desired word.

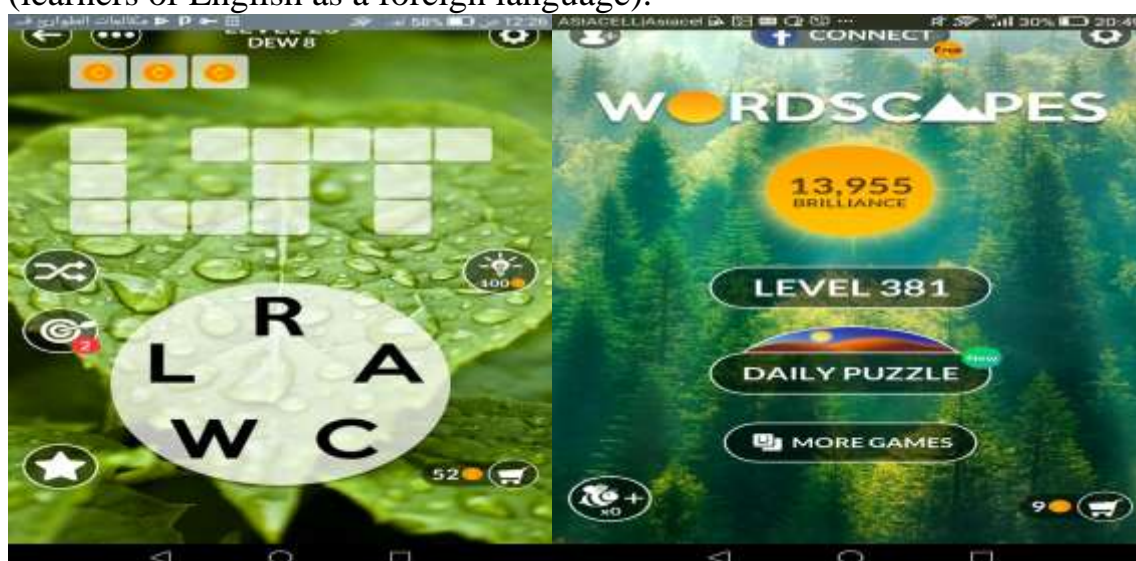
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In some levels there is a word outside the crossword or puzzle that can be identified from the same letters of other words, but it is not possible to complete the range or move to another level if the player (learner) exceeds this side word.

The means of the lights that sends a spark or lightning on the first letter of the word and sometimes the first two of them as the progress of player (learner) in the game to help him knowing the word required in the puzzle. All these methods exist to help the player (the learner) to know the word if it is not able to solve the puzzle and move to another new level and new words and levels of difficulty more. As well as to break the factor of boredom and frustration of not knowing the word required, especially among players (learners of English as a foreign language).

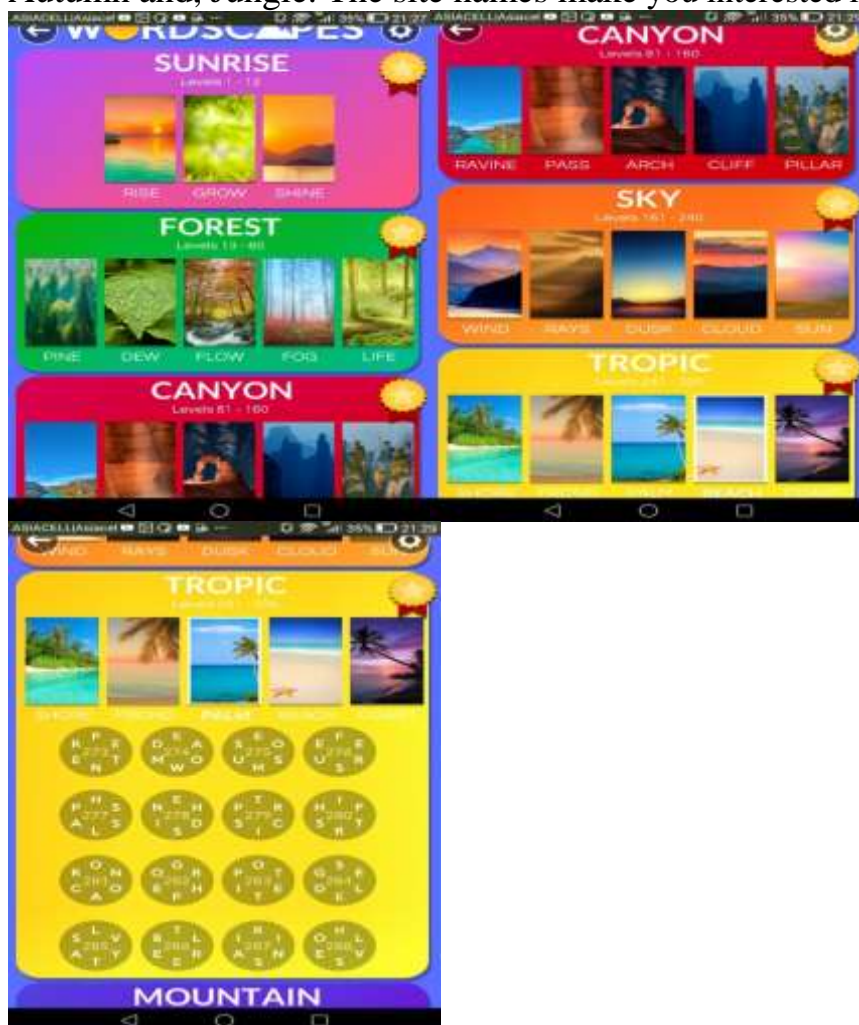


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It is preferable to use these means when absolutely necessary (according to the research opinion) to enable the player to know the word without resorting to the means of assistance and to develop the skill of comprehension and thinking of the players (learners).

It is also featured with containing levels named with names of nature and its phenomena of seasons, climate and sites etc. Moreover, it is also characterized with bright, natural, and cheerful colors makes the player (learner) more excited not only to solve the scope of the puzzle of the level, but to know the meaning of those words or names carried by each level of the game, such as: Sunrise, Forest, Canyon, Sky, Tropic, Mountain, Winter, Flora, Autumn and, Jungle. The site names make you interested in playing this game.



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The game consists of 6000 levels each level is different from the other in terms of difficulty and ease as well as the number of ranges and puzzles in it. Difficulty increases gradually as we progress in the game to the last level, which is called (Master) level of mastery or skill maximum and cannot reach this level easily and here lies the diligence factor and competition also for the second time. And that each level cannot be opened or pass without completing the level or scope accepted.



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Within the game levels there is a three-letter technique (i.e., the solution must be a word of four letters and above three letters rejected) and if the player (the learner) otherwise there is an error-sounding technology or the word of three letters is not written in the spaces allocated to the letters. Here lies the difficulty and suspense factor in the game.



There is another competition factor in the game is (Star Tournament). Each new word gets a star and the more stars progressed to a higher level in the competition and be competing with all participants in the game around the world and continuously the player (learner) can get first place But you must keep playing in order to maintain its position and progress in the competition. The time of the competition is displayed on the screen and for a period determined by the location of the game.

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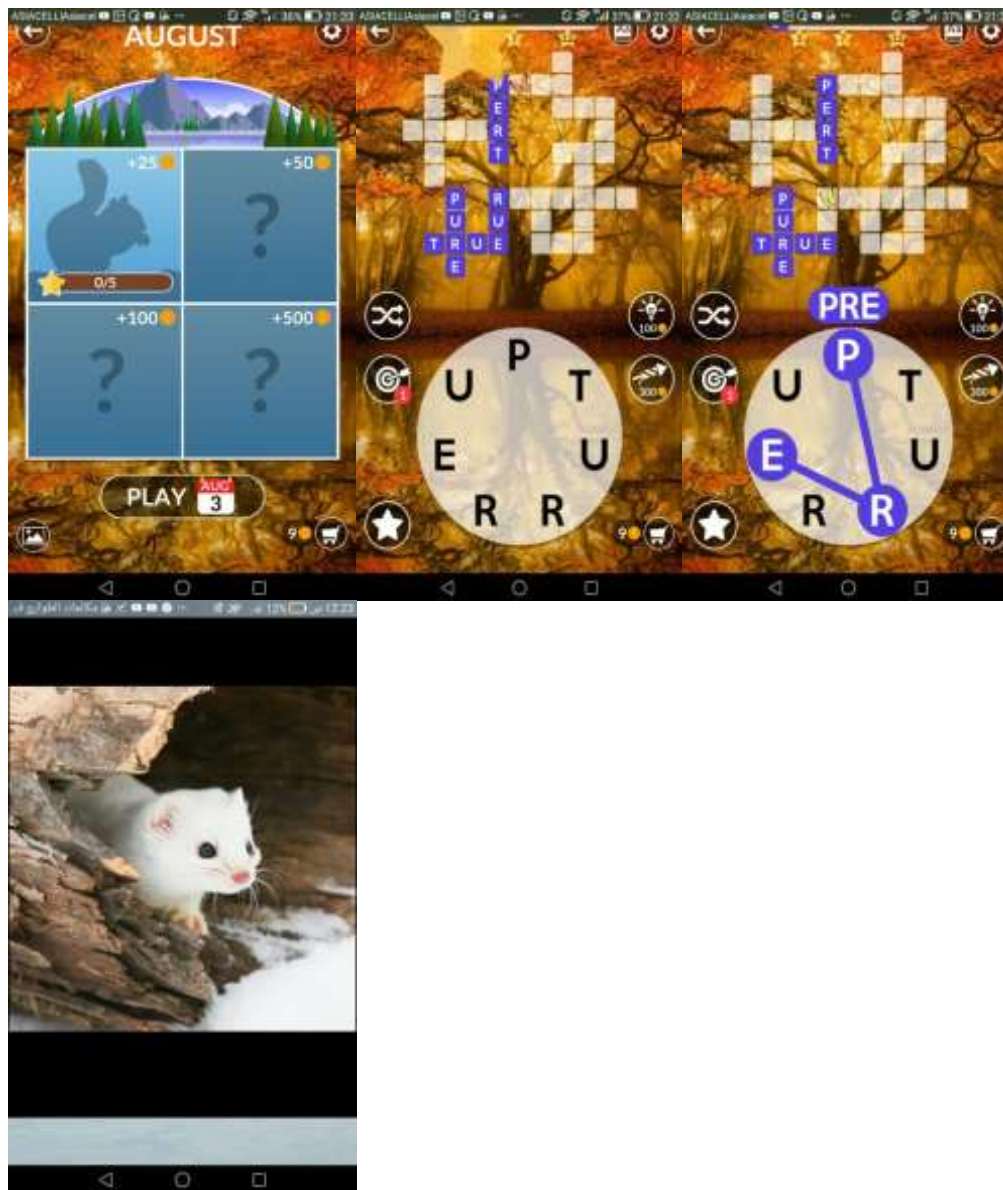
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Another part in the game is (daily puzzle) and has the same specifications and techniques found in the main part of the game, but this part is characterized by the presence of a number of butterflies colored different colors depending on the puzzle displayed. The butterfly can only be obtained if you guess the word in the same place of the butterfly, i.e., the butterfly is considered as a guide to the desired puzzle and behind the puzzle there is a hidden and shaded image cannot be detected only by completing the puzzle and the number of butterflies required in the puzzle. And this part is associated with the calendar for the days of the week and months so it is called daily puzzle.

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As mentioned earlier, the game possesses the element of thrill, competition and joy, as well as the element of encouragement and motivation to solve the puzzle and gain the maximum number of vocabulary of various categories and types, and through the presence of words such as (nice, wonderful, amazing, impressive, spectacular,etc)
(Note: all pictures above are screenshots from the learners' phones, taken to make the study documented with real situation...)

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7. Conclusion

The factor of patience is needed by teachers when teaching EFL learners how to learn vocabularies through using a variety games that related to words. These games must be new and interesting so that learning can be enjoyable.

Games such as “Wordscape Game” can create an effective atmosphere of learning, especially, vocabulary learning. As mentioned above, the most popular and familiar games amongst many ones used by teachers and educationalists to make the process of teaching and learning easiest, particularly, vocabularies teaching and learning. For instance: Hot Potatoes, Memory Challenge, Last One Standing, Pictionary, and Bingo.

In choosing the suitable and the appropriate game for teaching vocabularies, teachers should put into consideration time, materials, and designing. Despite merits and demerits of using games as a tool in teaching vocabularies, these games can let learners have fun during acquiring the lesson materials or trying to remember all the vocabularies through the implementing of the game. Using such games should be chosen carefully, i.e., according to the learners' interest, level, needs, and comprehension. As a suggestion, games should be used suitably to the topic or materials of the lesson presented and this can be guaranty effective. The fields and parts of a game must be controlled by the teachers wisely and skillfully.

8. Suggestions for Further Studies

- 1.To study the effect of gender in acquiring vocabularies through playing wordscapes game.
- 2.Examining EFL learners' achievement in acquiring vocabularies before and after using this game.
- 3.Investigating students' attitudes towards using such games in learning other skills.

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