

The effectiveness of using games in enhancing vocabulary retention and vocabulary use among primary school pupils

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Abstract:

Vocabulary is the cornerstone in learning any language not just English language. It is not only a matter of memorizing words but a perfect use of them. Games are potential in learning process since they are helping to upgrade the entire process from a boring one to more interesting. The research sheds light on the effectiveness of involving games in vocabulary learning sections and how it would be beneficial helping young learners to retain and use words. The research also gives some examples of games and investigate the obstacles that stand against using games.

The researcher used a questionnaire as a data- gathering tool from teachers ended in they totally agree that games are so helpful especially for shy pupils. Teachers use some of good techniques but they need to incorporate games. The researcher also developed a vocabulary quiz and given to random participants and the results show severe lack in terms of vocabulary learning, giving some recommendations to help teacher while using games. Teachers fully liked teaching English vocabulary but they suffer from poor engagement of their pupils.

Key words: vocabulary, retention, games

اثر استخدام الالعب في تحسين الاحتفاظ بالمفردات اللغوية

□ واستخدامها لدي طلاب المدرسة الابتدائية

□ اسراء مصطفى فضل عبد المجيد

الملخص:

المفردات اللغوية هي حجر الزاوية في تعلم اي لغة وليس اللغة الانجليزية فقط . انها ليست مجرد حفظ للعديد من الكلمات ولكن الاستخدام الامثل لها. تعتبر الالعب من الادوات الناجحة والمساعدة في عملية التعلم اذ تساعد في ترقية العملية برمتها من عملية مملة الي اكثر اثارة للاهتمام . يلقي البحث الضوء علي فاعليه استخدام الالعب في تدريس المفردات اللغوية و كيف سيكون من المفيد مساعدة المتعلمين الصغار في الاستبقاء علي المفردات واستخدامها. كما قدم البحث بعض الامثلة للالعب التي ممكن استخدامها وتقصي المعوقات التي تحول دون استخدامها. استخدمت الباحثة استبيانا كادأداة لجمع البيانات من المعلمين و خلص الي اتفاهم تماما علي ان الالعب مفيدة جدا خاصة للتلاميذ الخجولين. يستخدم المعلمون بعض الاساليب الجيدة ولكنهم في حاجة الي ادخال الالعب خاصة مع السن الصغير . قامت الباحثة ايضا باعطاء اختبارا علي المفردات لعينة عشوائية من الطلاب واطهرت النتائج نقصا حادا في تعلم المفردات مع اعطاء بعض التوصيات لمساعدة المعلم اثناء استخدام الالعب حيث احب المعلمون تماما تدريس المفردات اللغوية الانجليزية ولكنهم يعانون من ضعف مشاركة التلاميذ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستبقاء ، المفردات ، الالعب

1. Introduction

In learning a foreign language, vocabulary plays an important role. It's one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing together (Al Dawdeah & Al Najdat, 2013). Language emerges first as words (thornbury, 2002). Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. The concept of a word can be defined in various ways, but three significant aspects teachers need to be aware of and focus on are: form, meaning and use. (clouston, 2013)

Every person has some vocabulary knowledge that is relevant to English, even if it derives from his or her own native language .If teachers are aware of their students' strengths and weaknesses in English vocabulary ,then they have a place to start to expand students' knowledge and strengthen weaker areas (clouston, 2013). Clouston also indicates that as a native speaker he has been learning vocabulary for many years but he is still a learner because English vocabulary changes and grows referring that both teachers and students can develop a growing love for English vocabulary learning and naturally share a passion for words and phrases in any language.

All English language instructors need to be alert and intelligent regarding the most convenient method that meets students' needs and the best method to select for teaching vocabulary (Abdel Nasser & Montasser, 2021).

Games have become important for English language learners and teachers not only because they provide enjoyment and relaxation , but also encourage students to use their language in a creative and communicative manner (Al Dawdeah & Al Najdat, 2013). Gamification makes the hard stuff more fun and helps the

learners to get motivated and more engaged with the subject matter.

Lewis and Bedson (1999) claimed that the use of instructional games in the English as a foreign language classroom is beneficial because students often learn in an unconscious and stress-free atmosphere. According to Lee (1979) "a vocabulary game is one in which the learners' attention is focused mainly on words". As Allen (1983) referred "a well-chosen game can help the students acquire words correctly and feel that certain words are important and necessary because without those words the objectives of the game cannot be achieved".

Rixon (1981) as cited in Al Dawdeah and Al Najdat (2013) stated that the choice of the game depends on students' age and they benefit most from games which require moving around. Uberman (1998) showed the helpful role of games in vocabulary teaching she compared between traditional methods and the use of games and she observed the enthusiasm of her students in learning through games. Many experts of language teaching agree that playing games is really effective in terms of vocabulary acquisition and it should not be a marginal activity when the class has nothing to do.

2. context of the problem

To master using the language in both written and oral forms learners need to memorize more vocabulary as it is considered the main chief aspects of learning English as a foreign language. It is not only an issue of memorizing new words but it also implies using the words in the correct context. Teachers should pay more attention using appropriate techniques considering students' age and learning outcomes. The researcher reviewed previous studies related to vocabulary teaching which went to many techniques,

including the use of games especially at younger age. Integration in school curricula has become deeply common and this requires a better use of the language and the vocabulary which is being taught. Students have nothing to do in a vocabulary learning section but to listen to their teachers. Students only think of vocabulary learning as knowing the primary meaning of new words from the teacher or check the meaning from a dictionary or just writing words on papers. Students may write down lines of new words without any idea of the real use of them in context. In this regard students cannot know word classes, families and formation, synonyms and antonyms. They also cannot know how to use adjectives properly and even the past forms of the verbs. Furthermore, they cannot describe a picture or put some words in a sentence which of course leads to lack in writing, reading, speaking and listening skills.

According to lee (1995) "Many teachers learning a language should take place in a formal environment and if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really teaching". Unfortunately, because of limitations of time and curriculum, teachers normally have to cover all the content and materials, which students will be tested on and it is not always easy to incorporate games into the class.

To make sure that there is a problem, the researcher interviewed some English teachers who talked about the above mentioned problems. The researcher also prepared a vocabulary quiz to fourth grade primary students to test their ability to recall and use vocabulary learnt and to classify different words. A questionnaire was given to teachers, prepared by the researcher.

Statement of the problem

Pupils cannot memorize words well or they memorize list of words not knowing what are they or how to use.

3.significance of vocabulary games

Gamification theory in education is that learners learn best when they are also having fun. They also learn best when they have goals, targets and achievements to reach for. Learning vocabulary has been boring for a long time and the traditional teaching techniques have shown to be less effective especially at younger age in addition to learning vocabulary by mere copying and remembering which does not help students keep vocabulary in long-term memory. Games add a joyful atmosphere to the learning process as a whole. Games make students feel excited about something which is not exciting at all (learning process). A game has many benefits toward language learning. It offers students a fun-filled and relaxing atmosphere. Uberman (1998) explained " after learning and practicing new vocabulary, students have the opportunity to use language in a non-stressed way ". Games are also amusing and at the same time challenging. It introduces an element of competition into language activities. Games can also help shy pupils to express their opinions and emotions. They bring in new and different techniques in evaluation which most pupils do not feel worried about. To be short, games can be considered useful and effective tools that may be applied in vocabulary learning sections.

4.purpose of the research

The current research aimed at:

- a) investigating the effectiveness of using games in vocabulary learning sections.
- b) provide some implications for vocabulary games.
- c) Discussion of some games which can be involved in vocabulary classes to help both teachers and students

5.Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that using games can help learners to retain and use vocabulary in a correct and natural way.

6.Research Questions

The current research aimed at answering these following questions:

- Is learning vocabulary through games effective?
- Which games are suitable for the pupils?
- What are the features of using games to enhance vocabulary retention and vocabulary use?
- Are there any games which children are familiar with and that can be taken to vocabulary classes?

7.Theoretical Framework

1.7 Games and language

According to Lewis and Bedson (1999)

"playing games is vital and natural part of growing up and learning.

Games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing

a plausible incentive to use the target language"

Hadfield (1990, p.9) as cited in Omar (2021) defined games as "an activity with rules, a goal and element of fun". Hadfield (1990) showed that games can take one of the following forms:

a) Information gap. Students ask their partners to get missing information to complete the task or card they have or together solve a problem

b) Guessing games. The player with the information deliberately withholds it, while others guess what it may be.

c) Search games. Players must obtain all or a large amount of the information available to fill in a questionnaire or to solve a problem.

d) Matching games. These games involve matching pairs of cards or pictures. Everyone must find a partner with a corresponding card or a picture.

e) Matching-up games. Each player in a group has a list of opinions or possibilities. Through discussion, preferences, compromise, the group must reach an agreement.

f) Exchanging games. Players have certain articles or ideas which they wish to exchange for others, the aim of the game is to make an exchange that is satisfactory to both sides.

g) Collecting games. Players need to collect cards in order to want and complete a set.

Different scholars have different classifications of games as cited in Omar (2021) classified into ten kinds: structure games, vocabulary games, spelling games, pronunciation games, number games, listen-and do games, read-and do games, games and writing, miming and role play and discussion games.

According to Carter and McCarthy (1988) new words are forgotten if they are not recycled in some way and make it into long-term memory. "learning is a process by which information is obtained, stored, retrieved and used, therefore, the teacher needs to provide initial encoding of new words and then subsequent retrieved experiences" and a game can provide an opportunity for real communication and bridge the game between the classroom and the real world as cited in Omar (2021).

Brumfit (1994) claimed that 'games are activities that children naturally and universally engage in'. Hadfield (1990) stressed that "The emphasis in the game is on successful communication rather

than on correctness of language”. Several researches have shown that games are not time filling activities.

In order to learn and retain new words learners should participate in different task-based activities in their classrooms including vocabulary games. Methodologists also agree that games can help students review vocabulary effectively.

According to Lewis (1999) using games helps the students to relax; they remember things faster and better. A research conducted in Cambridge university in 2004 suggests that if learners see or use a word in a way different from the way they first met it, then better learning is achieved. Laufer (1997) as cited in Omar (2021) pointed out that vocabulary acquisition is related to the effect of repetition on learning. A related study by Wulanjani (2016) added that games are useful tools helping young learners recall materials in pleasant and entertaining way.

2.7 Examples of some vocabulary games

The research aimed at providing some vocabulary games which are up-to-date and suitable for beginner, pre intermediate and intermediate levels of students and also matching the increasing number of students in one classroom in a way let all students to get engaged. Those games are taken from <https://games4esl.com/vocabulary-games-for-kids/>
<https://www.eslkidstuff.com/esl-kids-games/vocabulary-games.htm>
<http://gamesinclass.blogspot.com/2011/05/coffeepot.html>

- Category Spin. Sit students in a circle. Spin a bottle or an arrow - the student that the arrow points to is first. The student needs to say a word from a pre-decided category. The next student will say last word plus his own and so on until it gets to the one who fails. For example: S1:"zebra", S2: "zebra cat", S3: "zebra cat dog"

- **Blind Toss.** Have students sit down in a circle. Place a mat on the floor with numbers and a flashcard (target vocabulary) on each number. Taking turns, each student gets blindfolded and tosses a beanbag so as to hit a number. She/he must call out that word the same number of times as the number indicates. For example: 4-dog, then "Dog, Dog, Dog, Dog!" and the student gets the equal points (4). At the end, the student with the most points wins! Good for memorizing vocabulary since they are repeating words. (Submitted by Salvador Domingo).
- **Pass the ball.** This classic classroom game is incredibly fun and a great activity to get your students motivated and energized. It's also a fun way to introduce or review vocabulary with students. All you need is a soft ball and some flashcards. Students will pass the ball around the class and when the music stops, the student with the ball must answer a question from the teacher. For example, if you are teaching vocabulary to do with colors, the teacher might ask 'What color is it?' Another way to play is, when the music stops, the student with the ball can ask the question and all the other students must answer. This way all students get to practice the vocabulary while playing the game.
- **Line Bingo.** Give each student or pair of students one set of vocabulary cards. Ask them to place them in a horizontal line in any order they want. Once students have placed their cards in a line, the game can begin. The teacher should say one of the words and if that word is on the left end or the right end of the line then students can turn that card over. If the card is in the middle of the line, students cannot turn it over.

- Hot seat. To play this game, you can divide the class into 2/3 teams or you can just play as a whole class. Choose one student to sit in the 'Hot Seat'. This is a seat at the front of the class facing the other students. Then from behind the student in the hot seat, show the other students a word from the lesson. The other students must try to describe what the word is without saying the actual word. And the student in the hot seat must guess. Kids absolutely love this game and it is a great way to review vocabulary that your students have learned that lesson.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMNI_4y63xc

- Whisper game. Write many words from the lesson on the board (at least 10). Then divide the class into two teams and ask them to make two lines in front of the board. Give the student at the front of each line a board eraser. Next, the teacher should whisper one of the words to the students at the back of the lines. Then those students should quickly whisper the word to the next student in line, and then that student should whisper to the next student, and so on down the line. When the word is whispered to the student at the front of the line, he/she should quickly run to the board and erase that word. The quickest one to erase that word wins a point for their team. Then change the student at the front and play again.
- Coffeepot. Good for the last few minutes of class, this activity helps students in the task of asking correct questions, which, in this case, are generated out of genuine curiosity. Start by explaining what "coffeepot" means (maybe with a picture) and telling them that they are going to use this word to replace a secret action, and that they will need to ask

many questions to discover what the action is. On the board, brainstorm and model the questions you want your students to practice. Divide them into two types: "yes or no" questions and "information" questions. (Do you "coffeepot" everyday? Do you need any help to "coffeepot"? Can you "coffeepot" anywhere? How many times a day do you coffeepot? Where did you last "coffeepot"? Who usually coffeepots with you? etc.)

- Spelling race. Taken from (thornbury, 2002): the board is divided into two halves and a representative from each of two teams stands at the board with a board marker pen or chalk. The teacher shows the rest of the class a word on a card. The teams must simultaneously spell not say the word to their representative, who cannot see the word. The first team to get the word on the board with its correct spelling earns a point. The game continues with different students taking turns to be the team representative.

Involving games is one of the answers to 'how to put words to work?' as (thornbury, 2002) recommended.

8. Definitions of terms

1.8 vocabulary: all the words known and used by a particular person, retrieved from

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/vocabulary>

Vocabulary is a set of familiar words within a person's language. Vocabulary usually developed with age, serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge, definition taken from

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocabulary>

2.8 Game: is a structured form of play, usually undertaken for entertainment or fun and sometimes used as an educational tool, definition taken from

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game>

3.8 Retention: you can use retention to mean the ability to keep or hold. If you have extraordinary powers of retention, you remember everything you hear or learn, definition taken from

<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/retention>

9. Limitations

- The current research was limited to 30 pupils of fourth primary grade in Sharkia governorate from (Omar bin al-Khattab primary school in Qurein directorate)
- There were some limitations related to time taken to conduct the research.
- The current research was also limited to some suggested vocabulary games such as guessing games, spelling games, games for revising vocabulary and games with the ball which is one of children's favourite activity ever.

10. Methodology

The method used in the research is descriptive one since it seems as the most appropriate for this research and the context where it takes part. The research's aim is to shed light on the importance of vocabulary games to enhance vocabulary retention and use and also provide some examples of these games in addition to investigating the obstacles that prevent involving games in vocabulary sections.

1.10 participants

The research was conducted among fourth grade primary pupils at (Omar bin al-Khattab primary school in Qurein directorate). This choice was based on their new curriculum and its need to new

strategies to help both teachers and students. The researcher also talked to some students who stressed some difficulties they are facing in vocabulary learning in terms of pronunciation and spelling of words and some indicated that there are too much words they have to memorize. It was too hard to work with whole population due limitations of time, thus a representative sample of 30 pupils was selected randomly to answer the quiz.

2.10 instruments

A questionnaire was prepared by the researcher, approved by her TEFL professor and administered online among English teachers. It consists of 20 questions of two parts: the first part is concerned with vocabulary, its importance and strategies used (Q1-Q12) and the second part is concerned with games (Q13-Q20).

A vocabulary quiz was developed by the researcher and given to students to test their level in vocabulary learning. It consists of 20 points, divided into making sentences, classifying words, guessing, giving synonyms, antonyms and past forms of some verbs and describing a picture in one sentence in addition to one point in terms of pronunciation in which they are asked to count syllables.

3.10 Results of the Quiz

Students were given the vocabulary quiz on 2/3/2023 to estimate their ability to use some words based on their prior knowledge and taken from their book, the researcher explained how to answer the quiz and the result revealed as following:

Table 1

sample	Total points	mean	Highest score	Lowest score	VAR.S
30	20	2.3	12	0	7.74

Table 2

Total	9	6	5	2	4	2	one	one
130	studen	studen	studen	studen	studen	studen	stude	stude
score	ts	ts	ts	ts	ts	ts	nt	nt
	0	1	2	3	4	6	8	12

The great majority of students were not able to use words correctly in sentences, give the past form of some verbs, give the opposite of some words and know the difference between verbs, nouns and adjectives. They also cannot write one sentence about a picture they were shown in addition to making spelling mistakes. The researcher also observed that they formed sentences using their native language (Arabic). It is necessary for a teacher to do his best to improve the existing situation using variety of techniques in vocabulary learning sections.

4.10 Results of the Questionnaire

The researcher built a questionnaire, used it to collect data from teachers and administered it online. It depends on open-ended questions to give a space for respondents to express their own views freely. The researcher explained and clarified the topic to all the participants. After collecting the questionnaire, each question was analyzed separately from others.

The aim of the questionnaire is to investigate teachers' background about vocabulary games and to explore teachers' current strategies to teach vocabulary finding out the obstacles that prevent involving games in the classroom. The questionnaire is made up of twenty questions classified into two sections the first section focus on vocabulary in general and the second one is

concerned with games. Responses on the questionnaire were sent from 20 English teachers.

Question 1

How long have you been teaching English?

Answer	frequency
Less than 10 years	9
Between 10 and 20	6
More than 20	5
Total	20

Question 2

What do you think more important, vocabulary or grammar?

Answer	Frequency	percentage
vocabulary	11	55%
grammar	0	0%
both	9	45%
Total	20	100%

Question 3

How important do you think vocabulary is?

Teachers sum up the importance of vocabulary is that it's extremely important to speak, express our thoughts, understand and interact with others. Some teachers said that it looks like an engine of a machine and central in language teaching and learning, not ignoring its role in daily life usage. Teachers agreed that vocabulary improves all language areas; speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Question 4

Do you like teaching vocabulary?

Answer	Frequency	percentage
Yes	19	95%
No	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Question 5

What is the hardest thing about teaching vocabulary?

From teachers' opinions the researcher concluded that list:

- pronunciation
- too much repeating
- meaning in context
- teaching different meaning of a word
- words are forgotten easily
- verbs that cannot be acted out
- difficult concepts related to science
- too much words to memorize
- memorizing longer words
- words that have more syllables
- getting pupils use new vocab

Question 6

Are there words your students still keep forgetting?

Answer	Frequency	percentage
Yes	15	75%
No	2	10%
Depends on student	3	15%
Total	20	100%

Question 7

Do you separate your vocabulary list into nouns, verbs, adjectives...etc.?

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
yes	14	70%
no	2	10%
sometimes	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Question 8

Is there a correlation between teaching vocabulary and vocabulary retention?

Answer	Frequency	percentage
yes	15	75%
no	4	20%
I think so	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Question 9

How do you help your students review vocab in a fun way?

A list was concluded from teachers' experiences:

- PowerPoint, flash cards and miming
- CD audio, crosswords, visual items and some games
- Songs, puzzles, roleplaying, real objects, shuffle words and orally
- Using daily life examples

Question 10

How do you test vocab in a fun way?

There were variety in teachers' answers as following:

- ✓ Using them in context with miming
- ✓ Matching, making sentences and asking them about them
- ✓ Taking turns
- ✓ Using models
- ✓ Writing down words
- ✓ Orally
- ✓ Unscramble
- ✓ While telling them a story and using pictures

Some teachers also referred that there is not always enough time to test vocab.

Question 11

Which techniques do you usually use in vocab sections?

Different techniques as concluded:

- Presentations
- Repeating, listening
- Flashcards and pictures
- Using mind maps
- Reading aloud and translation
- Writing on the board
- Videos on phone and songs
- Brainstorming
- Inquiry based-learning

Question 12

How long does vocab section take?

Answer	Frequency
Whole session	5
10 min	4
15 min	1
20 min	4
Half an hour	3
Depends on the number of words	3
Total	20

Question 13

Do you ever use games in vocab classes?

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
yes	14	70%
no	6	30%
Total	20	100%

Question 14

If so what are vocab games, you know?

Teachers referred to some games listed in:

- Hangman
- Initial letters (a word begins with the last letter in the previous one)
- Last man standing
- Gathering letters to complete a word
- Using a ball to start with certain letter

- Using Ribbons and sometimes memes
- Card games and crosswords
- Matching pairs, Pictionary and checker

And teachers who do not use them answered “I do not know”

Question 15

Are there games which children are familiar with and that can be taken into vocab sections? If so name some.

Answer	Frequency
yes	2
I don't know	18
Total	20

One teacher suggested hide and seek game and another one suggested that he may ask a child to write down a letter in a plain paper and ask his mate to form a word using that letter.

Question 16

What do you think of vocab games? Are they important?

Answer	Frequency
yes	18
no	2
Total	20

Teachers summed up the importance of vocab games is that they are so helpful

For kids and a great way to break down routines. They agreed that games are

Super at younger age.

Question 17

Do you think every language teacher should know about vocab games?

Answer	Frequency
yes	16
no	1
Up to teacher	3
Total	20

Question 18

Do you think vocab games can help young learners retain and use words correctly?

Answer	Frequency
yes	17
no	0
Maybe	3
Total	20

Question 19

What are the obstacles that prevent using games?

From teachers' point of view, they are:

- + Time limitation
- + Number of students
- + Devices supply
- + Big number of vocab in one lesson
- + School preparation
- + Classroom will be noisy and messy
- + Not knowing the rules of a game
- + Shy pupils hardly participate

Question 20

Are games helpful for shy pupils?

Answer	Frequency
yes	20
no	0
Total	20

11. Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

This research reveals that games contribute to vocabulary learning as they give students a chance to learn, practice and to review vocabulary in a pleasant atmosphere. Although teachers are using number of good techniques in vocabulary teaching sections, there is a must to involve games trying to come over things that hinder using such a powerful technique. Games also give positive views about teachers' ways of teaching, building challenging atmosphere and strong relations among peers. There are too many games that teachers should be aware of and how to apply. A game can be an effective way in learning a new language which can be created based on our real life (Wulanjani, 2016). Teachers should be creative and innovative searching for games from children's daily life.

However, even though games sometimes do not work since students have different learning styles and preferences, and some other factors such as being used in an inappropriate time, the nature of games themselves, and even the nature of teachers, it is still

worth trying to use them in class because they offer several good advantages to students.

While playing games, the learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. In a way, students acquire language unconsciously since their whole attention is engaged by the activity. Through such activities students match the course with the context of the game. Games should be an integral part of a lesson, providing the possibility of intensive practice while at the same time immensely enjoyable for both students and teachers.

Teachers should choose an appropriate technique in teaching young learners. Teachers should make lessons playful and full of physical movements with various activities. In teaching English vocabulary to young learners, teachers are expected to have the skills to present simple English. Teachers should try to give as clear as possible explanation of the meaning of the words being taught.

Recommendations

Various factors should be taken into account when language games are used one of which is how to choose the suitable game. Games should be designed to give students the concept of teamwork. Teachers should consider the level of games that fits students' language levels and knowledge background.

One point teachers should bear in mind is that games should be used to revise and recycle previously studied content, rather than involve new content. Choosing a game must match the content of the lesson.

One common question often raised among teachers is that when to use games. The fact that games can be exploited at any stage during the lesson. Students are often arranged to play games in pair work, group work, the whole class and individuals.

To conclude, learning vocabulary through games is an enthusiastic technique making students eagerly wait for the next lesson, getting ready for a new challenge and of course love their teacher not feeling bored while learning.

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