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KNOCKING OUT LANGUAGE BARRIERS: USING BOXING TRAINING TO TEACH ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TO PREADOLESCENTS

Introduction.

Language learning is a complex and demanding process that requires extensive cognitive effort. Considering the lack of physical activity in standard academic environments and the prolonged period of remote schooling due to the CoVid-19 pandemic, the process becomes even more challenging. This led to the idea of researching the impact of sports training on language learning.

A systematic review of the relationship of physical activity on the cognitive functioning of children conducted by I. Bidzan-Bluma and M. Lipowska demonstrated that participation in physical activity increases the ability to focus attention, develops a broader lexical network and vocabulary comprehension, and improves working memory. It also states that engagement in sports activities fosters motivation, self-control, and the ability to set goals [1]. As boxing is a competitive kind of sport requiring extensive physical and cognitive exertion, it seemed to be an appropriate sporting discipline to test its impact on language learning.

Research.

We developed a training program consisting of 16 sessions conducted throughout the period of 2 months. Sessions were conducted twice a week and lasted 1 hour each. The focus group included two 9-year-old primary school learners who studied English as a second language. Our training program aimed at improving their physical endurance, teaching basic boxing techniques, and developing basic lexical knowledge in the English language.

This led to the development of several principles:

1. English must be used as the main language during the training sessions. The usage of the Ukrainian language, which is native to the learners, had to be minimized to maintain second language acquisition.
2. Each exercise is explained using visual demonstrations along with the multiple repetitive usages of short phrases or single words in English.
3. Repetition is used as the leading approach for memorization and vocabulary reinforcement.

These principles helped us systemize the training process and ensure that both exercises and lexical material are memorized. Considering these requirements, we adapted the available exercises to reinforce language learning.

Here are some examples of the adapted exercises:

1. Throwing medicine balls in different variations: left hand, right hand, both hands, underhand throw, and overhead throw. Learners must pronounce the

words «left» and «right» when throwing with a corresponding hand. When we use a type of throw that includes both hands, the learner must say «catch» or «got it».

2. Abdominal crunches. During each repetition, learners must count aloud in the English language («One, two, three...»).
3. Footwork techniques in the boxing stance: stepping forward, backward, and side-to-side. Learners must react to the instructor's commands like «step forward», «step back», «step to the left», «step to the right», «move», and others. The instructor must demonstrate the movements while giving the commands.
4. Boxing technique: teaching the learners to use the frontal stance. The instructor must show the stance and use phrases like «hands up», «head down», «tense your fists», «bend your legs», and others while visualizing their meaning.
5. Boxing technique: throwing punches while running on one spot. The instructor must demonstrate the activity and use the phrase «I am running». Then the learners must do the same.

The application of these exercises allows us to develop the learners both physically and lexically. It may be seen as the creation of an artificial language environment for non-formal language learning that could essentially improve learning outcomes when combined with academic learning.

Conclusions.

By the end of the training program, the learners were able to understand and differentiate all the commands. They completed the required activities while actively using foreign vocabulary. A prominent note is that they were eager to correct each other whenever one of them made a mistake.

Their physical condition was also notably improved. When we started working with the learners, they got noticeably tired by the 20th minute of working out. We had to give them only 1-minute rounds when training boxing technique in pairs and 1,5-minute rounds when throwing 3 kg medicine balls. By the end of the program, the learners only showed signs of being tired by the 40-45th minutes of training. We could increase the length of the rounds up to 2 minutes for working in pairs. For the medicine balls, we increased the length to 2 minutes per round and the weight of the medicine balls to 5 kg.

The greatest challenge was to ensure the learners understood the instructor's explanations related to boxing technique. Regular exercises like crunches or push-ups were easy to demonstrate and explain. However, with boxing technique, there were certain periods when the instructor had to switch to the Ukrainian language in order to ensure complete comprehension.

Further research in this area requires gathering a larger focus group of preadolescent learners to improve the generalizability of the results and avoid potential statistical errors. Also, it is necessary to test the approach with other age groups like middle-school, high-school learners, and adults. This would help us get a deeper insight into the feasibility of the approach of teaching English as a second language via boxing training.

REFERENCES

1. Bidzan-Bluma, Ilona & Lipowska, Malgorzata. (2018). Physical Activity and Cognitive Functioning of Children: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 15. 10.3390/ijerph15040800.