



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMES ON LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to determine the role of educational games on learning a foreign language, and to compare games with more traditional practices as effective learning tools on the basic educational stage students at governmental schools in Jordan, an experimental research is conducted using three groups out of six randomly. To determine the relationship between learning a foreign language and educational games among the participants, a one way Analysis of Variance is performed based on achievement levels.

Key words: Language Learning, Different Techniques, Recall Material, Entertaining Ways, Communicative Competence, Target Language, Routine Activities.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a hard work. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. As we need meaningfulness in language learning, and authentic use of the language it is useful to follow and create many different techniques and procedures. That through creative procedure we can have an interactive environment which may lead to an improvement in learning a foreign language.

According to students' achievements we can assess through utilizing pre, and post tests if our students have improved or not, and if our procedure is useful, effective or not. Games and especially educational games are one of the techniques and procedures that the teacher may use in teaching a foreign language. Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. A game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages, games should be used at all the stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom, since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence and generate fluency and may have a significant role in improving a second language acquisition.

MAIN PART

One useful strategy to encourage learning a foreign language is using language games. When using games in the classroom, it is beneficial for teachers to have a complete understanding of the definitions of games, which usually are defined as a form of play concerning rules, competition, and an element of fun. Teachers should also consider the advantages of games: the ability to capture students' attention; lower students' stress; and give students the chance for real communication. Lastly teachers need to assess how to use games appropriately in the classroom. It is important to choose an appropriate time and integrate them into the regular syllabus and curriculum.

However, because of the limitations of the syllabus, games often cannot be used, as much as they should be. Therefore, it may be challenging for teachers to try to add some games in class in order to develop students' English proficiency of the target language. Some teachers think that language games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in classroom since games sometimes have been considered only for its one element that is fun. In fact, games can provide English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) students more than that. Among several strategies used to improve students' proficiency such as visual aids, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), drama, role-play, and so on, games are another useful strategy to promote students' language proficiency (Richard - Amato, 1996). This paper aims to give a clear understanding of what games are and why and how games are used in the classroom. Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target Language. WellChosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation. "Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication." (Ersoz, 2000) Language games are not activities mainly aimed to break the ice between students or to kill time. Byrne (1995) gave the definition to games as a form of play governed by rules. They should be enjoyed and fun. They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities, but a way of getting the learner to use the language in the course of the game. Similarly, Jill Hadfield (1990) defined games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun. "There are a great number of language games. So teachers have a variety of choices. However, in deciding which game to use in a particular class and which games will be most appropriate and most successful with their students, teachers must take many factors into account.

It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games. There are many advantages of using games in the classroom:

- 1-Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
- 2-They are motivating and challenging.
- 3- Learning a language requires a great deal of effort, games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
- 4- Games provide language practice in the various skill-speaking, writing, listening and reading.
- 5-They encourage students to interact and communicate.
- 6-They create a meaningful context for language use. In a research paper done by Mei and Yu-jing they said that Games are fun and children like them. Through games children experiment, discover, and interact with their environment. Through playing games, students can learn English the way children learn their mother tongue without being aware they are studying; thus without stress, they can learn a lot even shy students can participate positively. They point how to choose a game.

- A game must be more than just a fun.
- A game should involve "friendly" competition.
- A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.
- A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.
- A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material.

Students may wish to play games purely for fun. Teachers, however, need more convincing reasons.

CONCLUSION

Teachers need to consider which games to use, when to use them, how to link them up with the syllabus, text book or programmed, and how, more specifically, different games will benefit students in different ways. The key to a successful language game is that the rules are clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun. A dissertation was written on the role of word games in second language acquisition second language pedagogy, motivation and ludic tasks, the study attempted to determine the role of word games and student motivation in the second-language classroom environment; and to compare games with more traditional practices as effective learning tools. The games were selected for their adherence to principles of task-based instruction and communicative approaches to pedagogy.

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