

THE BENEFITS OF USING GAMES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract. This article provides information about the importance of games and shows the advantages of teaching English through games. Educational games help to create friendly atmosphere, provide students with practice in fluency, increases confidence. We have so many games for EFL classroom, but not all of them are useful. Games should not be played only for fun. Games should help involve students and teach how to use language. Here we explained some reasons and criteria for using games in teaching foreign languages.

Keywords: game, classroom, students, atmosphere, create, activity, engage, involve.

INTRODUCTION

Games are one of the most important components in EFL classrooms. They include activities which have goals and rules at the same time fun. Hadfield describes games as “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun.” Some authors suggest that language games should be placed at the center of the foreign language teaching program rather being accepted as a peripheral part of the program, since, besides being fun, additionally they include goals and controlled by rules.[3]

Following definition given by Greenall, it can be said that games create a competition positively among students who are involved in a language activity.[2]

METHODS

During the research we used qualitative analysis and comparative methods. With the help of them, a number of articles and books are observed and analysed. Games are fun activities that promote interaction, thinking, learning and problem solving strategies. Often games have an aspect that permits the players to reduce information in a short time period. Some games require the players to engage in a physical activity and complete a mental challenge. Games allow for creativity, independence and higher order thinking

RESULTS

There are a number of reasons that games deserve a place in the language classroom. First of all, they are fun, which is extremely important, because they can help activate students who may have been inactive before, due to lack of interest. Keeping students active is vital because teachers will never be able actually teach students anything unless they can get them to participate in their own learning process.

Second, games also play a big role in helping participants build relationship, and to feel equal. Playing games in the classroom can also help create a friendly and positive atmosphere where seat arrangement can differ from games, and thus cause diversity from the norm which can be extremely helpful in keeping an exciting learning environment.

Third, the reason most people want to learn a language is to be able to use it in real situation, for example when travelling. Games can be very good way to practice this skill because they can easily be used to reenact various situations from real life and provide students with practice in their fluency. Also, by using games in the classroom the teacher is giving his students a bigger role, and he himself is stepping out of the frontline which is a positive thing because it allows students to take on more responsibility. Also that allows students to do more on their own, and that can very well result in an increase in their confidence level. [6]

Fourth, language students need to be exposed to the language in a variety of situations, which is a need games can fulfill. Language students also need to be ready

to take on the experience, keeping their minds open and being willing participants again, games make this possible.

Fifth, language students need to be emotionally involved, meaning they need to feel something while they are exposed to the language. Strong emotions, such as happiness, excitement, amusement and suspense allow students to feel positively about their learning situation and are therefore likely to have a positive effect on language learning.

Sixth, games are good for shy students and students with low confidence, and that applies specifically when playing takes place in smaller groups because then they get a chance to speak in front of fewer audience instead of having to express themselves in front of the whole class. Also it is sometimes easier to open up and forget the shyness when playing a game because the atmosphere is not as serious and more emphasis is put on fluency rather than grammatical correctness [6].

Seventh, games can be a good strategy when teaching various subjects because they are very likely to spark interest amongst students. They can be used with students of all ages, and when they are used with other teaching methods they create diversity which is ideal for school work. A study that was undertaken in Iceland in 2006 shows clearly the need for diversity in school. Many participants in that study complained about the lack of diversity, and that they wanted more of it in order for their learning to become more fun and progressive in their school [7].

Finally, using games in the classroom is important because many children do not get enough opportunity to play during their free time, which can be traced to the rapid changes in our society [10].

Language games are not activities mainly aimed to break the ice between students or to kill time. Byrne gave the definition to games as a form of playing 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 games. Similarly, Jill Hadfield defined games “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun” [3].

DISCUSSION

Constantinescu states some advantages of games as in the following:

- “Games build up learners’ English repertoire in a familiar and comfortable environment (even for students who may have special needs), where they feel confident. More than this, English is widespread used with computers.
- Games increase motivation and desire for self-improvement.
- Challenge and competition are key factors for any game and students pay more attention to completing the task.
- Interdisciplinary approach. Students use knowledge from other classes, too.
- Games develop students’ ability to observe.
- Games have clear rules and objectives.
- Games develop critical thinking, problem solving, and imagination.
- Games offer new and dynamic forms of teaching/ practicing which replace the traditional worksheets.
- Games are adaptable for different levels of knowledge.
- Educational games are easy to understand and use.
- Educational games do not take long time to be played in the class.
- There are many online educational games which are free of charge.
- Immediate feedback both for the students and the teacher.
- The results are more visible (sometimes both visual and acoustic) and have a stronger impact.
- The working time is usually known from the beginning and it is respected
- Games facilitate collaborative learning but, in the same time, students may learn at their own speed and cognitive level.
- Games may be used in the classroom as rewards for students.”[1]

Students may have the willingness to play games completely for fun. However, teachers need more reasons for convincing to play games. Teachers have to be very careful about which games should be used, when to use them, and how to connect them with the syllabus, text book, and how, more particularly, beneficial they are. While choosing and adapting games in the EFL classrooms teachers should

be very careful at many points. Constantinescu expressed that when choosing language games, many points are needed to be considered by teachers:

- “Games should have an aim. They are used to motivate students, not only for fun.
- Games should focus on the use of language. By their means students have to learn, practice, or refresh language components
- The content should be appropriate. It should fit the curriculum, be correct from all points of view and not to promote wrong values (e.g. violence).
- Games should be technically easy to use in the classroom.
- Games should be in accordance with students’ age and level of knowledge.
- Games should keep all of the students interested.
- It is advisable to use short games; otherwise students may lose their interest.” [1]

CONCLUSION

Foreign language teaching methods are improving rapidly. Teacher centered teaching methods are not being used. So, games are best way to engage students in the lesson. Games help students create real English atmosphere. If teacher chooses games in right purpose and time, he or she gets successes in teaching.

In conclusion, according to the findings of this study, it can be obviously understood that games are very important instruments in language teaching classrooms in terms of providing a relaxed environment for learners and for both teachers and learners, games are very useful if they have an educational purpose rather than being fun.

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