

TEACHING CHILDREN ENGLISH THROUGH GAMES

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ABSTRACT

English is a language of modernization, technology progress, industrial communication, and education. The importance of English as a world language has made people to learn it as early as possible. Although children have an innate ability to learn a language they do not learn properly if they find their lessons boring and unexciting. In fact, children learn better through interesting activities and for this reason games are very useful tools for teaching them a foreign language. Actually these are the tools that help children learn in an enjoyable environment without making them feel the pressure of learning a foreign language. This study aimed at investigating the effect of using children's games in developing the elementary graders' vocabulary, communication and proper pronunciation. It aimed also to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the use of games in their English classes. This paper introduces the benefits of some interesting games in teaching children English and also suggests incorporating them at the primary level English curriculum in Kosova.

Keywords: Children, games, vocabulary, pronunciation, education.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English especially in elementary schools aims to motivate and encourage students to be more confident in studying English. For elementary students, teaching English through games brings fun and enjoyment in expanding children's vocabulary, learning proper English grammar. For this, teachers have an important role. They should keep students interested, motivated, and engaged in learning a foreign language and attain the lesson objectives. It is commonly believed that children learn a new language fast and efficiently. These who begin acquiring a foreign language early do not have so many problems with pronunciation. What is more, they have the possibility to imitate the teacher's accent very precisely. On the other hand, they become bored quickly and lose their concentration easily.

Teachers are to help students in overcoming the difficulties that they may face while learning and acquiring a foreign language. They often learn indirectly rather than directly-that is they take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather than only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught.

Their understanding comes not just from the explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with. They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and curiosity about the world around them.

This study:

1. may help English language teachers to create effective learning environment using games,
2. may stimulate specialists' and supervisors' interest in conducting training courses for their teachers to use the children games in their classes,
3. may help the fourth graders' to improve their vocabulary as a result of using games,

4. may enrich English language curricula with activities based on games.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Children have been known to be more enthusiastic and lively (Cameron, 2001). They are considered to be the natural language acquirers (Dunn, 2011). Moreover, children are also the self-motivated learners who have the habit of picking up a new language unconsciously. In addition to this, they seem to be always giving a try on an activity even when they do not fully understand why or how. Surprisingly, the difficulty of learning to talk in foreign language, for example, English, is not a concern for children at all, although this difficulty was addressed by adult learners who determinedly learn English through grammar-based textbooks (Dunn, 2011). It is commonly believed that children learn a new language fast and efficiently. These who begin acquiring a foreign language early do not have so many problems with pronunciation. What is more, they have the possibility to imitate the teacher's accent very precisely. On the other hand, they become bored quickly and lose their concentration easily. No child is exactly the same; some children develop their language competence slower, some gradually, however, the following characteristics describe the average young learner between five and ten years old (Wendy A. Scott et al. 1995: 1-3).

According to The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1995), games are defined as “an organized activity that usually has the following properties: a particular task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players, and communication between players by spoken or written language” (p. 89). Language games are not aimed to kill time or break the ice between teachers and students. Hadfield (1984) said games are “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun”.

Games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term. They can be used at all stages of the progression from controlled to free practice, serving at one end of the range as a memory aid and repetition drill, at the other as a chance to use the language freely and as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. They can also serve as a diagnostic tool for teacher, who can note areas of difficulty and take appropriate remedial action. (1999, p.7)

According to Roth (1998), playing is a child's natural way of learning. Since birth, play—constructive play—constitutes the fundamental aspects of children's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development. By exposing to the learning environment in which there is an existence of constructive play, children are confirmed to expand their intelligence, for instance, their knowledge and understanding of the world around them. In this sense, play thereupon helps prepare children for their academic learning once they begin their school years and even at each step along the academic journey. However, the most common misconception about learning is that it is supposed to be serious, intense, and, no doubt, solemn in nature (Kim, 1995). If a person, in his or her learning environment, is experiencing fun or is exposed to hilarity and laughter, it is assumed that he or she is not really learning. Despite this fact, one needs to accept that it is still possible to learn as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. When it comes down to learning environment of children, it is almost impossible to separate playing from learning. This is due to an undeniable fact that children love to play, and most importantly, plays happen to mirror what is important in their lives.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the implementation of my study. First, I am going to explain the choice of the methods used. Second, it is followed by the combination of the teachers' interview and classroom observation. And the last step, I am going to use different theories that are relevant to my topic for the choice of the methodology type.

I have chosen to conduct interviews with two teachers because I think that through this method I can get a lot of information in a short period of time. On the other hand this kind of method answers my research questions. According to Mathers N, Fox. N & Hunn. A (2002), the interview is considered to be an important data collection method, which involves verbal communication among the researcher as well as the subject.

I have also conducted a classroom observation, which means that I attended to a classroom in order to see in reality what methods and teaching materials the teachers use. Based on Kawulich. B (2005), in qualitative research also observation is another important data collection method about people or processes. By observational processes, researchers are able to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews.

Moreover, I decided not to use any quantitative method, and the reason was because I felt that it will not give me any deep and personal reflection that helps me to answer my research questions. So by choosing qualitative methods I am able to capture the information that comes from participants' own perspectives.

As mentioned above, I have chosen two teachers for interview, through this, I wanted to get an overview of teachers' own perspectives on English games, and it also gave me a lot of information regarding teaching methods on using games and about teaching materials as well. And based on the above objectives I have built up the questions that were addressed to the participants. They preferred to be anonymous and I will respect their decision. The interview questions consisted of six questions, which deal with specific issues regarding using games. The questions deal initially with teaching methods the last two questions deal with teaching materials. In addition, I have carefully chosen the questions in order to get answers to my research questions.

The first question was if they use games. The second question was which games they use. The third one was how often they use games in their sessions, the fourth question was about which was the best method to teach through games according to teachers. And the fifth one was if games are adequate resource to learn and teach English, and the last one was about if there is anything that teachers would like to change or improve in the textbook.

Results of the teachers' interviews

The answers provided in the interviews are summarized in this section. They are very good teachers, in the other hand it shows that they use different methods, and they have also different work experiences as teachers. The interview with the teachers helped me to complement my own observations regarding using games in English language learning.

Teacher 1 explains her teaching methods:

Do you use games in your teaching method?

- *Yes, I do. I try to combine different methods when teaching English to my students, I prefer teaching English language through games connecting it with everyday life.*

So it means that Teacher 1 teaches her students with additional materials not only with textbook.

Therefore, when asked “Which games do you use?”

- *Songs, chants and rhymes are very useful and adorable for children. I think that it is an excellent resource to practice listening skill, teaching vocabulary and pronunciation, and they like singing and dancing; filling the gaps of the songs, using flash cards, competitions and races, hangman, memory game etc.*

The following question was “How often do you use games in your sessions?”

- *It depends to the topic what is more appropriate to use. Therefore, I always use additional material to introduce new vocabulary appropriating to the syllabus, I think that this is an effective resource to learn the language. Playing with students, teaching how to pronounce the words properly, and we listen to CD to learn from native speakers.*

On the question “How do you use games in your sessions?” Teacher 1 describes the way she teaches songs:

- *When we learn, for example, a song, first we listen to it in order to know the rhythm, and follow the lyrics, then I explain the words; we sing the song together and then we sing the song while we are dancing. In general, pupils love dancing and they enjoy a fun time while they learn the language. Playing a CD is very important because they learn how to pronounce the words properly from native speakers.*

I also ask students to match the words with appropriate pictures, for example parts of the body, and I also use flash cards to practice vocabulary.

On the question “Do you think that the game is an adequate resource to learn and teach English?”

- *Yes, of course. I totally agree with this learning tool. Students like doing dynamic activities and for this reason, using games is suitable to motivate students to learn the language. Games are considered a valuable pedagogical tool in learning English and they help develop language acquisition.*

On the further question about the textbook, if there is anything she would like to change or improve

- *Well yes, definitely, I think that there should be more songs and rhymes in the student's textbooks also there would be a lot of fun for children if there are some pages to colour, for example read the sentence and colour the picture – ‘colour the sun yellow’ etc.*

Based on the above citation textbooks isn't a sufficient material to teach and motivate children in learning the language. In addition, Teacher 1 explains that it is important to get students engaged.

Also Teacher 2 was part of this investigation. On the question of whether she uses games

- *Yes, not much. Because the class gets too noisy.*

Teacher 2 was very short in her answers.

On the question “Which games do you use?”

- *Flash cards, hangman, memory game.*

The following question “How often do you use games in your sessions?”

- *Sometimes, ...according to the syllabus.*

According to her answers she is focused in the textbook, she doesn't use additional materials or motivate students.

On the question “How do you use games in your sessions?”

- *Well, for example, I use flash cards to learn the words of a song. I play the song three or four times. The first and second time we only listen to the song, then we translate the lyrics, afterwards we sing the song.*

The method of teaching songs is a little different, Teacher 2 translates the lyrics, but she doesn't seem creative.

On the question "Do you think that games are adequate resources to learn and teach English?"

- *Yes, I think that they are very useful to motivate the students to learn vocabulary and the pronunciation.*

Both teachers agree in this question, the answers are almost the same.

On the last question about the textbook, if there is anything she would like to change or improve.

- *I think that textbook is good, but not sufficient.*

Based on the above citation it is apparent that Teacher 2 thinks that textbook is insufficient but she seems that she doesn't have a courage to use additional materials.

Results of classroom observations

Besides interview questions, I also conducted a classroom observation as this following section reports. My main purpose was to see in reality what methods the teacher uses and what materials as well. I agreed with Teacher 1 beforehand to attend to a classroom where Teacher 1 plan was to teach a song. The teaching class was held as follows:

Initially, the teacher started to demonstrate lesson plan and explained to the students what they were going to learn. She wrote the title on the blackboard and then the lyrics, she explained the words using the body language, didn't translate much because the students could understand her. She played the song again and the students could read on the blackboard while listening. After she was sure that they understood all the words she played the song and students started singing and dancing. The teacher encouraged the children to memorize the song through different interesting ways of helping them with their memorization like using flash cards, in the last 5 minutes she made them to fill the gaps of the song and let them sang the song, I must admit they enjoyed the class very much.

While I observed Teacher 2, she asked the students to open the books, she used flash cards to learn the words of a song, she played the song twice then she translated the lyrics, afterwards when she was sure they understood every single word she played the song and they started singing all together.

To sum up this observation, it shows that both Teachers used the methods mentioned in the interview answers. Students showed a greater willingness to study English as a second language in classes with games. In the first class, students were more engaged, more enthusiastic and more motivated than the second one.

CONCLUSIONS

Games encourage learners to interact, cooperate, to be creative and spontaneous in using the language in a meaningful way. Learners want to take part in activities to play games and are generally quite competitive. In order for them to take part they must be able to understand and communicate in the target language. Moreover, games also encourage learners to keep interested in the work and a teacher can use them to create contexts in which the language is useful.

The main reason to use games would be because these activities have a great educational value and they can be used in the classroom to make learners develop their speaking abilities, use the

language instead of just thinking about learning the correct forms and to make lessons very entertaining because they offer children a fun-filled and relaxing learning atmosphere.

Some advantages of using games in the classroom are also worth mentioning: they are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class, they are learner centered, they reduce learning anxiety, they are motivating and challenging they can offer foster participatory attitudes of the students, they integrate various linguistic skills, they provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading, encourage creative and spontaneous use of language.

Some examples of games

Whisper Circle or the telephone game Aim: Speaking (using a whisper), pronunciation, listening, grammar (it takes ...to do ...)

Divide the students into groups of 7 to 10.

Choose one leader from each group. Give the leaders the word, the phrase or the short sentence. Ask him to memorize it, go back to his group and whisper to the person on his right. Each person will whisper the word or sentence to the next person and the word or sentence can be said only once. The last person will say the word or sentence out loud.

The winning team is the one with the ending word or sentence closest to the original.

Matching games

As the name implies, participants need to find a match for a word, picture or a card. For example, students place 30 cards; composed of 15 pairs, face down in random order. Each person turns over two cards at a time, with the goal of turning over a matching pair by using their memory.

Labelling games

These are a form of matching, in that participants match labels and pictures.

Song picture

A song that tells the story is needed. The teacher draws simple pictures to illustrate the story; cut them out and make a worksheet. The sequence of the pictures has to be out of order. The children's role is to listen to the song and put the pictures in the correct order. (Phillips, 1993: 113)

Tongue twister

Tongue twisters are phrases, which have similar sounding words in a repetitive sequence. They aid language development, boost vocabulary, and are a lot of fun when recited together in a group.

'I scream, you scream, we all scream, for ice cream!'

'Greek grapes, Greek grapes, Greek grapes'

'Give papa a cup of coffee in a copper cup'

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