

Overview the effectiveness of using games in teaching english

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Received: 20/5/2024; Accepted: 28/5/2024; Published: 06/6/2024

Abstract: English has become increasingly important in our life because it is the bridge to connect people of various countries all over the world. Being the most popular foreign language in the world, it has drawn much of the attention in how to teach and learn it the most effectively. One of the most preferred methods is using games to teach it. This study is conducted with the purpose of discovering the power of using games to teach English. There are eight papers and thesis reviewed by the author. All of them show that it is effective to use games to teach English, but one of the papers asserts that games are useful but not always and teachers should consider some factors before applying them into the lessons.

Keywords: Using games, teaching English, effectiveness, lessons, foreign language

1. Introduction

There is a unique feature of humans that animals do not have – language. It is the door “through which a child contemplates the past, grasps the present and approaches the future” (Lawrence, Google). Especially in modern life, English, as the international language, is of great concerns in the globalized world, because it has been considered a necessary factor for communicating to work in order to get a well-paid job. Therefore, learning and teaching English has been drawing more and more attention of most of people, including the Vietnamese. One of the effective methods that teachers usually employ in foreign classes is using games. For example, using songs to teach listening by making students to fill out the blanks in the song’s lyric while they are listening to. By this way, students’ ability of listening is still improved and more importantly they learn it at ease without too much theory. Although the advantages of music to teach English have been repeatedly discussed by many educators (Orlova: 1977; Curtain & Pesola: 1998; Chiailli & Meilo: 1998). Teaching and learning through games is considered to be one of the most effectively educational methods.

This paper will provide some literature reviews of using games to teach English. Also, it will look into the relationship between these two fields to come to the conclusion of the effectiveness of using games for teaching. Finally, the study is expected to end with some notices when using games to teach English.

2. Research Content

2.1. Methods

On the process of conducting the research, I used

8 references for the research. All of them are related to the main issue of the paper which is investigating the role of games in teaching English as a foreign language. Also, for the diversity as well as the reliability of the research, various kinds of references from a paper (Gülin Yolageldili, 2011) to a thesis (Kamila, 2010); from different countries such as India (Lawrence, 2013) to Vietnam (Luu & Nguyen, 2010) in varied levels from learners as primary students to adults.

They are all taken on the Internet with the careful consideration of the author to achieve the purpose of the research, from Asian EFL Journal for example.

The author read through the references and came to some conclusions with similarities and differences among them.

2.2. Results

The eight studies under the investigation related to the fact that using games in teaching English have revealed several important points.

2.2.1. Definitions of game

Hadfield (1990; Quoted in Deesri, 2002, p.1) describes games as “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun.” Or a game is defined in the Oxford Dictionary that it is “an activity or sport with rules in which people or teams compete against each other”. What is common in all these descriptions is the fact that games involve many factors such as employing rules, fostering cooperation while making learning fun.

2.2.2. The fact of using games in English teaching

We should look at the fact of using games in teaching English. From my own experience, I find

that teachers tend to use different techniques, games in particular to deliver lessons to students. For example, when I was at secondary and high school, rarely could we experience the lesson through games. As I have grown older, I realize that our teachers normally followed the translation approach. Such lessons were so boring that many of us did not really attend the class and it was not effective as well because many of my friends after that even could not utter an English word. However, the situation has changed over time. Taking part in the university lessons meant that I had more opportunities to learn knowledge through playing games. That was truly amazing.

2.2.3. *Benefits of using games*

So, what are the benefits of this teaching method? The results of the eight researches are relevantly similar although they were conducted differently regarding time, place, learners' level. In his study, Lawrence (2013) selected 250 student teachers who were doing their B. Ed. Degree in the College of Education and he concluded that "the majority of the student teachers have a favorable attitude towards the using grammar games for teaching English at the secondary level". He further investigated and found out that gender also affected the situation of using games in teaching. In particular, he indicated that the female student teachers have more positive attitude than the male student teachers. This is also understandable in Vietnamese context when more female teachers use games to teach than the male ones. Moreover, he pointed out some factors affecting the attitude towards using games to teach grammar which are educational qualification, optional subjects and types of management. In general, there are differences in each criterion, but they all support the same idea that games brought about positive attitude towards teaching English.

Similarly, Nguyen & Luu (2010) dealt with grammar teaching with the application of games. They came to the four advantages of using games which were motivating learners, promoting learners' interaction, improving learners' language acquisition, and increasing learners' achievement. He added that Games are highly motivating since they are amusing, interesting and at the same time challenging. The activities in a game get all the students to move around, activate their mind and motivating learners in learning and retention. At that time, students who are shy also attend the activities with fun, forgetting their shyness and feeling of fear. In terms of interaction, it is obvious that games are good method to connect students. They have to play and work in a team, which helps them

not only learn knowledge but also learn soft skills like team – working, communication, problem – solving, etc. In this sense, no one can deny the importance of games in teaching English.

Align with this study, Yolageldili & Arikan (2011) exerted that teachers accept the effectiveness of using games in grammar teaching, yet they do not use games as frequent as expected. And he explained that was because "there is a very limited time and a strict schedule to study all the content and material" and it is "difficult to find a game for every field of grammar". I agree with this idea because in fact to apply a game to teach a unit, we need to spend a large amount of time searching for the technique and preparing materials for that lesson. For that reasons, games are ignored to be used in many cases.

Amy (2010) and Khuat and Nguyen (2009) also advocated the idea that using games is effective in teaching English. They added that games could "bring real world context into the classroom, and enhance students' use of English in a flexible, communicative way".

"Games can eliminate the anxiety aroused from using a foreign language or uncertainty about the correctness of the output". That is the claim of Palánová (2010). It is not always the limited knowledge but the students' shyness that prevents them from speaking a foreign language. Many of my students hardly speak in the class although they have enough vocabulary and grammar to build some simple sentences. However, if I ask the students to take part in a game, board game in speaking for example, they are always willing to join. On playing games, they forget that they are learning, speaking with their partners. In other words, they are not too shy to speak any more. They just think that they are playing game. Whatever the students think, the importance is that they have joined the lessons without little or no anxiety and the objective of the lesson is met.

I think there is one meaningful factor brought about by using games that no authors did mention. That is developing soft skills. Obviously, some of the necessary soft skills of the learners can be developed by taking part in games. Usually teachers organized games to be played in pairs and in groups. So to gain the best result, students have to cooperate with each other and discuss the problem. While doing this, their ability of communication is enhanced because they have to attempt to think critically and persuade other member to agree with them.

So what happens if there is a conflict in the group? For instance, your answer does not satisfy the

others. In this stage, students may get angry or even stressful for some time but gradually they must justify themselves and control the situation. They have to learn and confess that anyone can be wrong and so can they. Over time, students' skill of problem solving is improved or even mastered, which is no doubt meaningful for their whole life, not for only learning English. Moreover, working in a team forces them to care more about other members: how to communicate with other students, how to express the ideas briefly but effectively, how to persuade others, how to address the problems if they take place, and so on. A lot of problems can occur on that process and dealing with them well also means you are becoming better and better. By that I mean the team-working skill of students can be a good result of the lesson with games.

Moreover, by assigning and observing teams, teachers can determine the characteristics of students: someone is born to be the leader but others are born to be not. It is a good washback of using games also.

In a nut shell, the role of using games to teach English is undeniable. It can lower the students' anxiety, make them funnier and facilitate lessons very effectively.

2.2.4. Washback of using games

However, using games is not always a good choice because sometimes it not only does not facilitate the teaching but also discourages it.

That is also the conclusion of Palánová who said that perhaps it "takes away the time the students can use to be working individually" (2010). Some students are good at working only on their own and they need personal time to do. They do not want to be disturbed by their talkative friends or meaningless activities. The only thing that they care is the quality of the exercise, not the exciting learning atmosphere. Games are sometimes too noisy for such people.

Secondly, he explained that games create the overall class atmosphere in a way that it is not a real learning, making it more difficult to concentrate on studying for serious purposes. On the elementary level, students need encouraging to learn because the content is mostly simple and they do not have motivation and inspiration to learn. But regarding high levels, students should have time for critical thinking. In these cases, games are really annoying (Palánová, 2010).

Thirdly, though none of the eight authors pointed out but I believe games occasionally discourage learners from working. There are usually a group of students in a team. So some will work hard and some will not. Lazy students think that their partners will do

their parts and they need not do anything if the teacher is not watching their discussion.

Finally, the overuse of games in teaching also may result in the boredom of learners. Not all of the students are interested in playing, but they want to be challenged. As a result, despite the indispensable role of games, teachers should take into careful consideration before applying games into lessons.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to find out the influence of using games and teaching English and the answer for this is that games impose both positive and negative effects on teaching. I have reviewed and included discussions in the above part already.

What I want to emphasize is that English teachers should employ games in the teaching because of numerous advantages. However, to have the best lessons we should take many factors into careful considerations before applying any games into teaching. It is advisable that teachers should diversify the types of games employed in teaching depending on a wide range of key factors named level of students, class size, topic of the lesson and so on. Additionally, teachers should take games into consideration as an effective tool to teach English for numerous specific purposes in which four main skills in English learning are taught by adopting new methods of teaching related to using games in the lessons.

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