

# What are the attitudes of students at Dong Thap University towards the use of games in the classroom?

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**Abstract:** The use of games in the classroom has been under much investigation in recent years. There have been studies examining this issue. However, whether this practice has the same effects on different learners or not remained open to the researcher. Therefore, this paper was conducted with a view to determining students' attitude towards the use of games in the classroom. There were fifty-one respondents in the study who are at Dong Thap university. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. From the findings of the research, the majority of students (84.2%) were supporters of the practice, who showed their happiness during game times. In addition, the research revealed students' positive attitudes towards this practice. One suggestion from the finding was that the choice of games would affect the mood of the learners, so teachers should make careful choices. Finally, the limitations and recommendations for further research can be found at the end of this paper.

**Keywords:** Games, attitudes, motivation, skills

## 1. Introduction

Over the past twenty years, English has played an increasingly important role in the integration process of the world as a whole. It is common knowledge that almost all commercial trading and transactions are conducted in English, leading to people of different ages, especially students rushing to English classes in the hope that they can improve their communication skills so that they can stand a better chance of finding employment. In other words, the popularity and significance of English have been increasingly felt across the globe as well as in Vietnam.

Many teachers and educators have done their best to improve the teaching and learning of English. Even experienced teachers of adult learners had difficulty dealing with their new learners with different qualities and psychological characteristics. In order to achieve the best result, a variety of methods of EFL need to be applied and their psychological differences must be taken into account. For young learners, it is important that their learning is fun. Therefore, the use of games in the classroom plays a significant role in their learning process.

## 2. The research content

### 2.1. Research aims and questions

It is obvious that many teachers and educators have developed and used many games in their teaching. However, the appeal that each game holds for different groups of young learners in different

contexts varies. Within the scope of this study, the researcher would only like to look at how appealing each of the ten games given below is to young learners. This research is done to ascertain ratings of the games so as to be recommended to other teachers or to be used widely.

What are students' perceived attitudes towards the use of games in the classroom?

### 2.2. The names and how they are done are given and explained as follows:

a. *Word guessing*: there are 2 teams; one person from each team stands back to the board and guess what the teacher writes on the board from their teammate's explanations.

b. *Stop the bus*: the class is divided into 2 or 3 groups; 3 or 4 topics are given at the same time on the board and each time the teacher gives a letter, students have to find words that start with that letter for the topics given. When they finish, they say stop the bus.

c. *Describe the objects*: there are 2 teams. A small bag is given with some objects in it. Students will put their hand in the bag, feel the objects and describe to their teammates.

d. *Chain games*: there are 2 teams. They will take turns to shout out words that start with the final letter of the word from the other team.

e. *Change chairs*. The whole class will change chairs when a member says something that is true

to them. It usually goes as: “change chairs if you...”

*g. Simon says:* the teacher will say “Simon says...” and students will follow what he say. Otherwise, if the teacher just say the action without the phrase “Simon says...”, students are not allowed to do it.

*h. Miming:* there are 2 teams. Students will use action to tell their teammates what the words are.

*i. Running dictation:* the class is divided into groups of 4. The teacher will stick some papers with a short paragraph around the classroom and students will send one member of their groups to go and read and retell them what is written on the paper.

*k. Drawing dictation:* the teacher will read a description of a picture and students will listen and draw accordingly.

*m. Pyramid:* a pyramid is drawn on the board and divided into small parts with the points in each part. The higher it goes the more marks it gives. Students will answer questions given by the teacher to gain points for their team.

### 2.3. Literature Review

As the research paper centers around the use of the ten games mentioned above in the introduction, there is a need for a definition of games. However, Hunt and Cain (1950) state in their book that it is not easy to arrive at one-suits-all definition of games. They suggest a number of descriptions of games, but the most reader-friendly one is “a game involves a challenge against either a task or an opponent”.

On the one hand, many have agreed that games provide learners with a source of motivation. According to Pound (2005), games are viewed as a kind of reward for students or what they can expect after they have studied the lesson well. Chan and Lin (2000) strengthen this argument by stating that games do help learners become more motivated in their learning. Deersi (2002) shares the same view on the one well-acknowledged merit of games. By nature, language games enable student motivation to be promoted. Kuo (2008) looks at this respect in the sense of the classroom environment, emphasizing the effectiveness of a game-teaching environment in raising student motivation.

In addition to making learners feel more motivated in their learning, games have been reported to have a significant effect on their creativity. In the same work by Pound (2005), he states that the merit of organizing games in class is it helps boost learners’ imagination and creativity. This idea is supported by

Salvin (2006) who concluded that through games, a number of skills are enhanced, such as problem-solving, communication and creativity.

A further plus point presented in previous studies is that games help reduce stress caused by serious work in class. Atake(2003) states that one benefit of games in class is that they can minimize the anxiety among learners. According to Deersi (2002), besides offering learners a chance for near real-life communication, games contribute to a significant decrease in stress levels experienced by students, which helps create a positive learning environment.

### 2.4. Methodology

#### 2.4.1. Subjects

The participants of the research were 51 students who had spent at least 5 years and a maximum of 10 years on English up to the time when the research was conducted. The majority of them started learning English in Grade 3 and there were some who had even an earlier start. Over the years they studied at high school, all of them had chances to play different games, including those in the questionnaire. However, since they entered university, the situation has changed. The research questions in table 1 and bar chart 1 would provide a deeper insight into the relationship between them and the practice.

#### 2.4.2. Questionnaires

The method employed in this research was a questionnaire aiming to gain a deeper insight into students’ attitudes towards the practice of using games in the classroom.

### 2.5. Findings

The results which are presented in the two tables below provided interesting and valuable information concerning the use of games and the students’ attitudes and how much they like the games surveyed. For each of the items in the ‘research question 1’, students were given four response options (SA = “strongly agree”, A = “agree”, D = “disagree”, and SD = “strongly disagree”). As for set 2, the four response options were given to students in a slightly different wording (SL = “strongly like”, L = “like”, D = “dislike”, and SD = “strongly dislike”). However, in the report of the findings, the figures for SA and A, SD and D, SL and L, and SD and D were combined as the slight differences in the responses for the items do not make much difference to the overall conclusion.

The aim of this paper is to examine students’ attitude towards the use of games in the classroom.

Table 2.1: Students' attitudes towards the use of games in class

Items	SA	A	D	SD
1. Your English teacher usually applies games in your class.	7.8%	41.2%	43.2%	7.8%
2. You like playing games in your class.	37.2%	47%	13.8%	2%
3. Games are a kind of speaking practice	23.5%	54.9%	19.6%	2%
4. Games are a kind of listening practice.	19.6%	56.9%	23.5%	0
5. Games help you remember your lessons better.	49%	47%	4%	0
6. Games are a waste of time.	11.8%	17.6%	43.1%	27.5%
7. You are happy when playing games.	60.7%	25.5%	13.8%	2%

One of the most striking features from the table is that the number of students claiming that their teacher usually applies games was more or less the same as that of those stating the opposite, with around 49% and 51% respectively.

Secondly, with regard to students' general attitudes towards the use of games, the vast majority of the participants (just under 85%) reported that they liked playing games in class. There were only 15% of them who did not enjoy games. A similar question was asked at the end of the survey about how happy they are when they play games, just over 60% of them felt really happy, as opposed to only over a third stated that they really liked playing games.

When being asked about the positive effects of games on their studies, namely a kind of listening, and speaking practice, interesting results were revealed. An overwhelming figure of nearly 80% of them agreed that games did help them to do better in both listening and speaking exercises. Even more noticeable is the decidedly 96% students who agreed that they could retain more knowledge from the lesson thanks to the use of games.

Turning to the negative aspect of games, it is not surprising that over two thirds of the participants believed that games are not a waste of time or of little value, which was consistent with their ideas presented in other questions. However, the rest which accounted for about 30% of the total is certainly not a small number.

### 3. Conclusion

Even though the study was conducted in a limited scope, it does have its own significance in the teaching practice. The study revealed that although there were a few students in the sampled population who were against the use of games in the classroom, it was still widely seen as productive and beneficial to students' learning by other respondents. Therefore, it is advisable that there should be time spared for games as they can enable teachers to create a learner-friendly, non-threatening environment where students can freely express their ideas and thoughts. Games can serve as an effective tool for teachers to tap into students' linguistic potentials.

In addition, not all games are well-liked by students and there are reasons behind them which were discussed in more detail in the discussion section above. So the choice of games is also important. Having said that, however, teachers cannot give the same game to their students all the time, which will cause boredom and the game will lose its fun.

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