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. To determine the relationship between learning a foreign language and educational games among the participants, a one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is performed based on achievement levels.
Key Words: Language Learning, Different Techniques, Recall Material, Entertaining Way, Communicative Competence, Target Language & Routine Activities.

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 asses 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.

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. Well-Chosen 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. According to Carrier (1990) teachers should first consider t he level of the game to fit their students' language level. They should choose the game that fits the purposes of that class or the content. Moreover, teachers should consider students' characteristics: whether they are old or young, serious-minded or light-hearted, and highly motivated to learn or not. They should also consider when the game should be used

According to Richard-Amato (1996), even though games are often associated with fun, we should not lose sight of their pedagogical values, particularly in second language teaching. Games are effective because they provide motivation, lower students' stress, and give them the opportunity for real communication.

The main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that "they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses" (Avedon, 1971). Naturally when playing games, students are trying to win or to beat other teams for themselves or on the behalf of their team. They are so competitive while playing because they want to have a turn to play, to score points and to win. In the class, students will definitely participate in the activities. Therefore, it is possible for a teacher to introduce students to new ideas, grammar, and knowledge and so on. As in the dictation game, students are so competitive that they want to finish first and win. It can be clearly seen that games can capture students' attention and participation. They can motivate students to want to learn more. Moreover, they can transform a boring class into a challenging one.

Another reason why games are often used in language classes is that they lower students' stress in the classroom. In conventional classrooms, there is a lot of stress put on students trying to master the target language. Schultz (1988) said that"...Stress is a major hindrance in language learning process. This process [Learning language in traditional way] is by its nature time consuming and stress provoking... ... raise the stress level to a point at which it interferes with student attention and efficiency and undermines motivation. ..... One method has been developed to make students forget that they are in class ....relax students by engaging them in stress-reducing task (games)."

There is a high level of stress in the classroom because students have to face unfamiliar or unknown grammatical structures, words, texts and so forth. Therefore, students often feel uncomfortable and insecure in class, which inevitably affects their ability to learn. As a result, games can help lower their anxiety, make them feel comfortable, and want to learn more. It is believed that when students play games, they relax and have fun. Since students know that they are playing games and want to communicate efficiently they do not worry about making mistakes and do not try to correct themselves in every single sentence. When students are free from worry and stress, they can improve their fluency and natural speaking styles.

Next, students learn without realizing that they are learning (Schultz, 1988.) For instance, when playing a game called "What Would You Do If?" students will have to pick one hypothetical question from those that they have written in a box. They might get a question like "What would you do if a lion came into this classroom?" Next they have to pick one answer that they have written before. The answer they get may be "I would be a fly." Usually the question and the answer they get do not match each other, so students have to use their own imaginations to explain their bizarre answer, and everyone has fun listening to it. The explanation might be "If a lion came into this classroom, I would be a fly because I am a good person, so an angel would come and rescue me by turning me into a fly." While trying to explain, students do not worry too much about grammar mistakes because they want to communicate and to explain why it can happen. Apart from having fun, students do not worry about errors and punishment; moreover, they will learn a grammatical rule and have a chance to use it. Thus, they learn unconsciously-learn without realizing they are learning. Students stop thinking about language and beginusing it in a spontaneous and natural manner within the classroom (Schutz, 1988.)

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