RESEARCH ARTICLE

LANGUAGE GAMES: A DIVERSION FROM THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Language learning is hard work…..effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information. 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.

There are many advantages of using games in the classroom:

- Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
- They are motivating and challenging.
- Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
- Games provide language practice in the various skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
- They encourage students to interact and communicate.
- They create a meaningful context for Language use.

Many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time filling activities but have a great educational value. They are a diversion from the regular classroom.

Key Words: Language games, regular classroom, diversion.

W.R.Lee holds that, most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms (1979:2). He also says that games should be treated as central and not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. A similar opinion is expressed by Richard. Amato, who believes "games to be fun but warns against overlooking their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching".

"Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely", (Richard- Amato 1988:147). They can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (Hansen 1994: 118). They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson. Further more, to quote Richard- Amato, they, "add diversion to the regular classroom activities", "break the ice", "used to introduce new

ideas" (1988:147). In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better (Wierus and Wierus 1994:218). S.M.Silvers says many teachers are enthusiastic about using games as "a teaching device", yet they often perceive games as mere time fillers, "a break from the monotony of drilling or frivolous activities. Heal so claims that in a relaxed atmosphere, real learning takes place, and students use the language they have been exposed to and have practiced earlier (1982:29).

"Games encourage, entertain, teach and promote fluency. They should be used as they help students to see beauty in a foreign language"

Language games are a healthy challenge to a child's analytical thought. The rules of the game set clear limits within which the children's natural decision- making processes must function. With beginners, some games can resemble "Fun" drills, with the decision making reduced to substitution of a single word in a phrase. However, even in such cases, children are required to make individual choices based on specific language criteria which form part of the rules of the game. The key to a successful language is that these rules are clear and the ultimate goal is well defined. Of course, the game must be fun, whether played in English or children's mother tongue.

Definitions of game

According to Haldfield (1999): "A game is 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."

This definition highly evaluates the importance of games in teaching. It adds to teachers' techniques in teaching that games serve not only as an 'amusing activity', but as a technique to carry out tasks to learners amusingly as well.

Haldfield (1999) adds: "Games 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."

Haldfield further emphasizes the effective use of games. Students are always lazy to do the tasks. Therefore, games are used suitably in the way in which learners are led to participate in the games so that learners can have a chance to practice or use the new language items they have just learnt eagerly and willingly instead of forcing them to do the tasks unwillingly. It is more effective in a way that students can play and learn at the same time.

Lee (1991: 3) defines: "Games in the stick sense, which have a definite beginning and end, are governed by rules…"

Similarly, Hadfield (1990) defines games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun." Games are not carried in chaos. Games have the rules, and for it is necessary players to digest these rules before the start so that they can play the games smoothly without committing them.

According to Greenall (1990: 6), "The term 'game' is used whenever there is an element of competition between individual students or teams in a language activity." When appears 'an element of competition', all above rules are most needed. Besides, games are, in this case, emphasized to encourage students' solidarity in teamwork in which they have to try their best to do the tasks or maybe to code any requirements given in the games for their team spirit.

Therefore, games comprise many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. The main focus of using game in class is not only to help students to learn more effectively but also to have fun.

However, to use games in classrooms, it is equally important that before playing, the rules of the games are clearly explained and well understood by the students. There should be only a few, well-explained rules. Demonstrations also can be very helpful because it can help students understand the game and help them follow the rules.

- In a nutshell, as mentioned by Caillois (1957) "A game is an activity that must have the following characteristics:
- fun: the activity is chosen for its light-hearted character

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- separate: it is circumscribed in time and place
- uncertain: the outcome of the activity is unforeseeable
- non-productive: participation is not productive
- governed by rules: the activity has rules that are different from everyday life
- fictitious: it is accompanied by the awareness of a different reality"

There are many kinds of games designed for different levels as well as topics, so that students with different language proficiency levels can enjoy and gain the best results from them.

When to use Games

Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some left at the end of a lesson. Yet as Lee observes, "a game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do" (1979:3). Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. Rixon suggest that games be used at all 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".

Games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them to learn and retain easily. They usually involve friendly competition and they keep learner interested. They bring the real world into the classroom and enhance the student's use of English in a flexible way.

Why use games in class time

Games are fun and children like to play them. Through games children experiment, discover and interact with their environment (Lewis, 1999). Games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. The games make the reasons for speaking for seaking plausible even to reluctant children (Lewis 1999).

Through playing games, students can learn English the way children learn their mother tongue without being aware they are studying: thus without stress, they can learn a lot.

How to choose games (Tyson, 2000)
- A game must be more than just fun.
- A game should involve friendly competition.
- A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.
- A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.
- A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material.

Integrating games into the syllabus

Although it would be conceivable to teach English course solely based on games, most teachers have an accompanying textbook which they are required to work through over the course of the year. Games are either supplement the core material or (depending upon the flexibility of the programme) replace activities which you dislike or feel uncomfortable with.

It is important to read the course book or syllabus closely. There are certain aspects of the language which are not covered in the core curriculum. A game can fill the gap. If the syllabus is based on language structures then the games can make it more interesting. Games can serve a valuable backup, especially when a teacher has to substitute any teacher's class. They can help control the rhythm of the lesson and get a group of unmotivated children up and moving around, participating and being more receptive as compared to the rest of the lessons.

Language games can be used to introduce new material, to practice recently learnt language items, to introduce or practice certain themes, or to relax or energize a class. How a language game is used will ultimately depend on the 'personality' of the group of children. Do the children have a long attention span? Are they very active? Also to consider external factors as the time of the day the English lesson is held and what happens before and after, distinguish between 'Rousers' and Settlers'.

'Rousers' wake a class up, they get the adrenalin going. Typical 'Rousers' are movement games and games where there is an element of competition, guessing games are tend to get children excited. 'Settlers' are the other language,

calm a class down. Typical settlers are craft activities and games which focus on listening. Writing games also tend to settle a class, unless, of course, they are combined with other strong elements, for eg. running to the black board. Board games settle the group as well.

Things to remember while planning language games

- A game must be more than just fun
- Play different games from lesson to lesson
- Vary the order in which you play games.
- Always end an activity when the fun is still at its peak.
- Think ahead.
- Determine the language level.
- Control the class size (25+ children)
- Turn players into teams
- Set up game stations in the classroom
- Built up a stock of essential material
- Description of the game
- Duration of the game
- Procedure of the game

Types of Language Games

- Movement games
- Card games
- Board games
- Disc games
- Drawing games
- Guessing games
- Role play games
- Singing games and chanting games
- Team games
- Word games

Advantages of Language Games:

1. **Affective Domain:**
- Lowers affective filters.
- Encourages creative and spontaneous use of language.
- Promotes communicative competence.
- Motivates.
- Fun.

2. **Cognitive Domain:**
- Reinforces.
- Reviews and extends.
- Focuses on grammar communicatively.

3. **Class Dynamics:**

- Student centered.
- Teacher acts only as facilitator.
- Builds class cohesion
- Fosters whole class participation.
- Promotes healthy competition.

4. **Adaptability:**
- Easily adjusted for age, level and interests.
- Utilizes all four skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
- Requires minimum preparation after development.

Language learning is hard work…..effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information.

Example of a Language game
Read, Think and Answer
Game Type: Movement Game
Aim: To develop Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills.
Age: 10+
Class: VI Onwards
Group Size: 25-40
Time: 10 Minutes
Material: Flyers, plastic bowl
Content: Literature
Preparation: The teacher will prepare flyers (a piece of paper that has something (questions) printed/written on it).
Procedure

1. The Teacher will place the flyers in a plastic bowl.
2. She will call one student and ask him to pick one flyer and read the question written on it
3. The student will read the question
4. The teacher will ask the students in the class to raise their hands to answer the question
5. She will randomly select a student to answer the question

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6. Then again she will call another student and ask him/her to write the question on the blackboard/whiteboard.

This activity will be repeated till all the questions are read, answered and written. Through this game the teacher is making the class interactive by involving maximum students and simultaneously the four major skills of English Language Learning i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are being developed. This game is useful for teaching Literature- Prose/ Poetry/Drama/Short Story and Grammar. It helps to develop the cognitive, affective and the psychomotor domain.

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