THE USE OF GAMES FOR IMPROVING INTEGRATED SKILLS

Mamirova Malikaxon Xusravjon qizi*

*Student of Foreign Languages Faculty,
Andijan State University, UZBEKISTAN
Email id: mamirovamalikaxon5@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to find out how games are important and effective when used in EFL classrooms. This article demonstrates that using games can be dominant for improving integrated skills. The learners both learn the language and have fun in the classroom with the help of the games. Even shy and reluctant children react positively to them. Teachers must decide whether the level of the game fits students' language level because a game may become difficult when it is beyond the learners' level or it may become boring when learners find it too easy to carry on. Hence, what teachers should consider while choosing a game is the fact that children learn best with games which require physical action, interaction, competition and participation. Moreover, games provide encouragement to interact and communicate successfully for learners and permanence to carry on the effort of learning and create a context to use the language meaningfully, decreases anxiety, and allow learners to study in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere.

KEYWORDS: *Teaching English, using games, process of learning, skills, Language games.*

INTRODUCTION

Games play an important role in the language learning classrooms despite the fact that most of the teachers are not aware of it as a learning strategy. However; it has lots of benefits to the learning process of the learners. Firstly; games prevent the lesson to be ordinary and boring. Conversely, they create a successful and positive classroom environment where students and their learning are central. Games are always fun for the learners so they attract their interest unlike the ordinary lessons. The learners both learn the language and have fun in the classroom with the help of the games. Even shy and reluctant children react positively to them. This increases the motivation of the children because they play as an alternative solution which encourages students to keep their interest on the lesson and continue working. By this way, they reduce the stress of learning another language. **[1]**

Learners involve in the games actively, so games are called learner-centered activities According to Crookall . Through games learners' and teachers' roles are changed and teacher encourages learners to participate actively in their learning. As a result, games give a chance to learners to take responsibility for their own learning. From an instructional view point, creating a meaningful context for language use is another advantage that games present. By using games, different contexts can be created by teachers that allow learning unconsciously because the attentions of the learners are not on the language, on the message. As a result, when their

focus is on a game as an activity, learners acquire the target language as they acquire their mother tongue, that is, without being aware of it .

Constantinescu states some advantages of games as in the following:

- "Games build up learners' English repertoire in a familiar and comfortable environment (even for students who may have special needs), where they feel confident. More than this, English is widespread used with computers.

- Games increase motivation and desire for self-improvement.

- Challenge and competition are key factors for any game and students pay more attention to completing the task.

- Interdisciplinary approach. Students use knowledge from other classes, too.

- Games develop students' ability to observe.

- Games have clear rules and objectives.

- Games develop critical thinking, problem solving, and imagination.

- Games offer new and dynamic forms of teaching/ practicing which replace the traditional worksheets.

- Games are adaptable for different levels of knowledge.

- Educational games are easy to understand and use.

- Educational games do not take long time to be played in the class.

- There are many online educational games which are free of charge.

- Immediate feedback both for the students and the teacher.

- The results are more visible (sometimes both visual and acoustic) and have a stronger impact.

- The working time is usually known from the beginning and itis respected

Learners are excited by competition because the question of who will win or lose remains unanswered until the game is over. Similarly, games' making learning easier in an enjoyable way suggests that games are full of fun which leads to successful learning. In many games, learners are required to cooperate to achieve the goal and most learners enjoy cooperation and social interaction. It is believed that when cooperation and interaction are combined with fun, successful learning becomes more possible. To conclude, no matter how differently games are described, one cannot underestimate their pedagogical value both in teaching and learning a foreign language. **[2]**

Games provide language teachers with many advantages when they are used in classroom. One of these advantages is that learners are motivated to learn the language when they are in a game, McCallum emphasizes this point by suggesting that "games automatically stimulate student interest, a properly introduced game can be one of the highest motivating techniques." Avedon further argues that "games spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses". In other words,

games stimulate students' interest in classroom activities and as a result, students become motivated and willing to learn. Another advantage associated with games is that students' anxiety towards language learning decreases as games are employed. In language classes, learners feel stressful because they think that they have to master the target language that is unknown to them. Besides, learners become too anxious about being criticized and punished by their teachers when they make a mistake.

Games are advantageous at this point because they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence because learners do not afraid of punishment or criticism while practicing the target language freely. **[3]**

Games are student-focused activities requiring active involvement of learners. In Crookall's opinion, learners and teachers change their roles and relations through games and learners are encouraged to take active role in their learning process. As a result, games provide learners with a chance to direct their own learning. From an instructional view point, creating a meaningful context for language use is another advantage that games present. By using games, teachers can create contexts which enable unconscious learning because learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. Therefore, when they completely focus on a game as an activity, students acquire language in the same way that they acquire their mother tongue, that is, without being aware of it .

Some authors suggest that language games should be placed at the center of the foreign language teaching program rather being accepted as a peripheral part of the program, since, besides being fun, additionally they include goals and controlled by rules. S. M. Silvers, the author of the book Games for the Classroom and English Speaking Club, claims that games are often agreed by many teachers as tools which stop monotonous repetitions in the lesson are used to fill in time. He claims that many teachers often miss the fact that in a relaxed environment it is mostly possible that real learning take place, furthermore learners are able to use the target language that have been exposed to and have been practiced earlier by the learners. Following definition given by Greenall, it can be said that games create a competition positively among students who are involved in a language activity.

The approval for using games in a foreign language classroom can be seen in the fact that learners provide a lot of benefits through games. It was ensured by many experienced writers that games are educationally valuable. Some reasons are mentioned by Lee as in the following: games give a chance to escape from unusual routine, but they are very important in terms of motivation and challenges. Moreover, games provide encouragement to interact and communicate successfully for learners and permanence to carry on the effort of learning and create a context to use the language meaningfully, decreases anxiety, and allow learners to study in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. **[4]**

Games bring real-life situations to the confinement of the classroom which provides learners with an opportunity to use the language. Celce-Murcia argues that "in games, language use takes precedence over language practice, and in this sense games help bring the classroom to the real world, no matter how contrived they may be." To state this differently, by putting learners in real life situations, games make a connection with the real usage of language. In addition to these, McCallum explains that there are many advantages of games such as the fact that they

1. Focus students' attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items.

2. Can function as reinforcement, review and enrichment.

3. Involve equal participation from both slow and fast learners.

4. Can be adjusted to suit the individual age and language levels of the students.

5. Contribute to an atmosphere of healthy competition, providing an outlet for the creative use of natural language in a non-stressful situation.

6. Can be used in any language teaching situations and with all skill areas (reading, writing, speaking or listening).

7. Provide immediate feedback for the teacher.

8. Ensure maximum student participation for a minimum preparation.

Considering the level of the game is equally important while choosing games. Teachers must decide whether the level of the game fits students' language level because a game may become difficult when it is beyond the learners' level or it may become boring when learners find it too easy to carry on. When a game's value in grammar teaching is considered, teachers tend to use them for practice or to reinforce a specific grammatical aspect of language only if a game is suitable for learners' level so that the grammatical knowledge can be used easily as they are playing the game.

The fact that games enable social interaction and participation is also important. Learners, especially the young ones, learn better when they interact with their peers. Some games may include both cooperation and competition together. While students cooperate within a team, they, at the same time, compete against another team. Hence, what teachers should consider while choosing a game is the fact that children learn best with games which require physical action, interaction, competition and participation. **[5]**

Games encourage the students to active in the classroom, entertain them, teach the language naturally, and promote fluency. They should be used because they help students see the beauty in a foreign language and not just problems of the foreign language itself.

Many advantages of games can overcome the speaking problems. The competition of games gives students a natural opportunity to work together and communicate using English with each other. Furthermore, by integrating playing and learning, they practice the learned linguistic knowledge in a meaningful context.

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