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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GAME-BASED LEARNING TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES.

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Abstract: The article analysis the possibilities of using word games in the process of teaching a foreign language at a university. The main classifications of games are given while the main attention is paid to games of a lexical characteristics . The article substantiates the conditions that make it possible to use word games as effectively as possible in foreign language classes and also provides examples of games at different stages of working with students.

Keywords: Game-based learning, game methods of teaching a foreign language, language games, lexical games, adult education.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language at a university implies the formation of a number of competencies among students. In particular, graduates should be able to communicate orally and in writing in a foreign language and solve problems of interpersonal and intercultural interaction. Consequently, students should have certain knowledge (for example : knowledge of language means) and skills (to use formulas of speech communication, formulation of their point of view, etc.), as well as be able to correlate language features with specific situations of intercultural speech communication.

The solution of this complex, "global" task occurs during the entire period of teaching a foreign language at a university and requires the use of rational and effective approaches and technologies, forms and methods of teaching. In this context, it is customary to talk about the use of new information and communication technologies, active teaching methods, and a differentiated approach. However, the "basic element" is the methods and techniques of teaching a foreign language, which the teacher uses in the classes, directly working with students. Students' knowledge and mastery of language means, their use in communication depends on how effectively this material has been presented , fixed, and worked out.

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 (Lee, 1995): 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.

Literature Review

Games are one of the most important components in EFL classrooms. They include activities which have goals and rules at the same time fun. Hadfield (1990; Quoted in Deesri, 2002) describes games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun.

"Foreign language learning games can be considered as a framework to provide a

meaningful context for language acquisition. Constantinescu (2012) claims that learners can improve their understanding of written and spoken English via games. Games help learners learn words and structures in a context using correct pronunciation and spelling.

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 (Mei & Yu-jing, 2000).

This increases the motivation of the learners 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 (Mei & Yu-jing, 2000).

Learners involve in the games actively, so games are called learner-centered activities According to Crookall (1990). 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 (Cross, 2000).

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 it is respected
- Games facilitate collaborative learning but, in the same time, students may learn at their own speed and cognitive level.
- Games may be used in the classroom as rewards for students."

Students may have the willingness to play games completely for fun. However, teachers need more reasons for convincing to play games. Teachers have to be very careful about which games should be used, when to use them, and how to connect them with the syllabus, text book, and how, more particularly, beneficial they are. While choosing and adapting games in the EFL classrooms teachers should be very careful at many points. Constantinescu (2012) expressed that when choosing language games, many points are needed to be considered by teachers:

- "Games should have an aim. They are used to motivate students, not only for fun.
- Games should focus on the use of language. By their means students have to learn, practice, or refresh language components
- The content should be appropriate. It should fit the curriculum, be correct from all points of view and not to promote wrong values (e.g. violence).
- Games should be technically easy to use in the classroom.
- Games should be in accordance with students' age and level of knowledge.
- Games should keep all of the students interested.
- It is advisable to use short games; otherwise students may lose their interest.

Besides many advantages, there are some disadvantages for using games in EFL classrooms. Stojkovic and Jerotijevic (2011) mentioned some disadvantages of games as in the following:

- 1) discipline issues, learners may get excessively noisy
- 2) Straying away from the basic purpose of the game-play activity, perhaps, due to inadequate rules instruction, resulting in playing too much and the lack of learning
- 3) If games are already familiar or boring, students might not get equally involved
- 4) Some learners, especially teenagers, may find games unnecessary and childish.

Methodology

Data Collection Instruments

Of the many qualitative data collection instruments discussed in the literature, in this study specifically, a game, observation and the interview instruments were preferred. Since the aim of the study was to find out the positive effects of the Twister game on EFL elementary level students learning Twister game was regarded as a qualitative instrument itself. The other instruments following Twister were the semi-structured interviews and observation. In the following two subsections information about these three methods are given.

2.Game (Twister)

Games are incredibly valuable in a class because they provide many opportunities for learners to learn the language. As Carrier (1980, as cited in, Sanchez, Morfin & Campos, 2007) mentions it, three appropriate stages are in a lesson that games can be used; that it, they can be applied as an introduction, the development of the lesson, and as a conclusion of the lesson. When games are employed as an introduction, the lesson begins with stimulation. At this point, the students' interest is provided from the very beginning of the lesson. Besides they play a very crucial role to know what level students already have. Moreover, games can be used for revision of a previous activity. Furthermore, games are included after development of the lesson to emphasize an item which is

Twister is a game which is often used in EFL classes, although its effects on learning are not yet satisfactorily evidenced on empirical basis. In this study, the effectiveness of this game which is used as an instrument of data collection as well as a game to be tested.

3.Semi-Structured Interviews

Since, interviews ask questions orally and collect available data orally (Kuale, 2006), semi-structured interview is preferred in the present study. One of the main reasons for the selection of semi-structured interview type is that it allows more detailed information

to be collected compared to the structured interviews, as they include investigations in order to collect further exploratory information concerning the questions. The other reason for employing semi structured interviews is in- depth understanding of the interviewees' perceptions, attitudes and feelings. The rationale for using interviews was that the need of researchers to see factors which could not to be observed directly such as students' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Non participant observations were also used to obtain information about participants' behaviours and actions concerning the EFL context under study (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In this study, semi-structured interview was conducted with students to reveal their views about learning English vocabulary with a game. With this aim in mind, researchers developed an interview form. After finishing all the activities related to the game, the interviews were conducted with four participants, who granted permission and who were informed that their names will be kept confidential and their comments will be used only for the research purpose.

4. Observation

Researchers find observation methods useful in a variety of ways. Schmuck (1997) indicates that they supply ways to control for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine the interaction between participants, understand how they interact with each other, and check for the amount of time that is spent on various activities. Moreover, the researchers find participant observation helpful in terms of checking definitions of terms that are used by participants in interviews, monitor events that informants may not be able to or may not be eager to share ideas that would not be polite or sensitive, and monitor situations participants have reported in interviews, by means of that they aware of inaccurate and distorted information described in interviews which are provided by those informants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As it was mentioned before observation method is used in this study. Participants were observed during eight hours in order to cross-check the observed behaviours, verbal reactions, feelings with the interview results of the participants.

5. Participants

Since qualitative research designs deal with a few number of participants, only two participants were decided to deal with to get into deeper understanding. These participants are selected on a criterion based sampling. A certain criteria that the participants who had the below given characteristics were chosen, in a random manner of the general:

- It is not important if they are EFL learners in English Preparatory at university or not.

- Their level of English proficiency should be pre-intermediate level.

General characteristics of the two participants are given below:

Pseudonym	AGE	Nationality	EDUCATION
AKMAL		UZBEK	ENGLISH CLASS
MUHLISA		UZBEK	ENGLISH CLASS

6. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data gathered began with the transcription of the audio-recorded interview data. This is then followed by the familiarization of the data transcribed through reading the transcription several times. The data were then given meaningful codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Those codes were then developed into categories with the intention of collecting the most relevant data under general labels. These categories and the data that suits them best are presented in the following section.

7. Feeling of fun and satisfaction

The findings revealed that the features of Twister the word cards, etc. created fun, relaxation, satisfaction. The mostly given reasons to the question - do you think this game motivated you to learn vocabulary- is as follows; "I would like to play this game again and again because, this game is very enjoyable. When I have fun, I am more motivated, satisfied, and eager to learn." (Interviewee, Muhlisa). The finding of this study is parallel with the related literature. Bartle (2004) claimed that people play games because they would like to have "fun". In the same way, Gee (2007) points out that pleasure cannot be separated from deep learning and working hard.

8. Feeling lower anxiety and stress

Learners have to encounter unfamiliar words while learning a second language, so they feel a high level of stress. Therefore, they do not feel comfortable and secure, which certainly influence their ability to learn. As a conclusion, games assist to decrease anxiety, feel comfortable, and want to learn more. It is assured that they are relaxed and have fun. Since, learners know that while they are playing games to interact effectively not being worried about making mistakes and not to worry about correcting themselves in every single sentences. When learners do not feel worry and stress, they could develop fluency and speaking styles. Moreover, when learners play a game their anxiety decreases as games are used. Furthermore, the level of anxiety of learners is high since they are afraid of being criticized and punished by their teacher when they make a mistake. Games come on the scene at this stage because they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence. Crookal, (1990) highlights that learners do not feel fear of being punished and criticized while they are producing the second language freely. One of the participants Akmal indicated that "while I was playing the game, I did not consider if I made a mistake or not, I only used the language to give the message". Another participant Muhlisa pointed out "While I was playing the game, I was not under any stress, since I was enjoying while presenting the words.

9. Discussion of the results

The first topic we analyzed in this review were the distinct game elements and the empirical proof for their effectiveness. A first and important finding here is that there is still a lack of a common definition and framework concerning educational games. The studies often lack a thorough explanation and description of the implemented game which in turn hampers drawing conclusions on the effectiveness. Next to this, notwithstanding the call to focus more on game elements instead of games that focuses on which elements can be considered as indisputable in an effective game and thus influence learning outcomes (Aldrich, 2005; Wilson et al., 2009), only a scarce amount of articles investigated game elements (e.g. competition, interactivity, feedback, background music, etc.) Some of these elements evoked differential effects. Although we can conclude that game elements seem to matter, it remains difficult to decide which elements and which combinations of elements are the most effective. Consequently, because of this shortcomings in this research field, also questions regarding game development and appropriateness remain unanswered (Wilson et al., 2009). Next to the focus on the distinct game elements, we also wanted to sketch a more complete picture of the implementation of games in educational settings. Therefore we focused on the environment, the moderating variables and the learning outcomes. The use of games in educational settings seems to evoke positive effects on students attitudes, behavior, engagement and likeability. Games can draw players in, capture their interest, engagement, etc. (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble, 2010). This means that, according to Barab et al. (2010), educational games are technological and methodological means for creating curricula that are immersive, interactive and experientially consequential.

However, some carefulness is called because the results of this review also show that the implementation of educational games does not always seem to assure better learning performances.

Besides, it seems that a bunch of variables and aspects should be kept in mind (e.g. environment and moderating variables). An overall finding is that much more research is necessary to be able to identify which aspects and variables are relevant to effectively stimulate learning with educational games. Nevertheless the fact that games are considered as a new instructional technology with great potential (Becker, 2007).

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to explore the importance of using games in EFL classes. As this findings show that using games creates an environment in which there is fun and satisfaction besides high motivation for learning a language. Moreover the role of games in order to decrease anxiety of using the target language cannot be ignored. Games are important for teaching English because they are a way to provide for learner not only having fun and amusement with the target language but also practice incidentally. To be short, games can be accepted as useful and effective tools that are effective for teaching vocabulary. The use of games in EFL classes is a way to provide more interesting, enjoyable, and effective teaching (Uberman, 1998). In conclusion, according to the findings of this study, it can be obviously understood that games are very important instruments in language teaching classes in terms of providing a relaxed environment for learners and for both teachers and learners, games are very useful if they have an educational purpose rather than being fun.

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