



THE ROLE OF GAME-BASED ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TO PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This article examines the placement and use of interactive games and other game-based activities in the education of primary students, with a focus on effective methodology and proper implementation. It explores how games can enhance learning by promoting engagement, motivation, and the development of cognitive and social skills. The study highlights the positive aspects of incorporating games into the classroom, such as improved retention, active participation, and a supportive learning environment. Additionally, the article discusses the contributions of key scholars who have influenced the field of educational games, including Comenius, Froebel, Vygotsky, and Piaget, emphasizing both theoretical foundations and practical applications. The findings underscore the value of games as a meaningful educational tool for young learners.

Keywords: Game-based learning, interactive games, primary education, educational methodology, classroom activities, learner engagement, cognitive development, social skills.



INTRODUCTION

The exploitation of games in children's learning is not a recent idea. This thought was already supported by Czech teacher Jan Amos Komensky in his book *Schola Ludus* in the 17th century. In recent decades, the field of second language acquisition has increasingly emphasized learner-centered approaches to language teaching [1]. Among these approaches, game-based activities have gained considerable attention as an effective pedagogical tool, particularly in primary education. Due to young learners' cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics, traditional instructional methods often fail to sustain their engagement. Jean-Jacques Rousseau who believed that play is a form of free exploration of the world, not mere entertainment [2]. Therefore, the integration of game-based activities in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) has been recognized as a means to enhance motivation, participation, and language acquisition among primary school learners. As Lev S. Vygotsky once said "Play is the leading activity in preschool and early primary school age, through which the child's basic psychological functions are formed" [3].

In today's rapidly changing world, a growing number of children demonstrate a lack of motivation toward formal learning, particularly during the early years of primary education. Young learners often find traditional classroom practices monotonous and disengaging, which can negatively affect their attitude toward learning a foreign language. Consequently, educators face the challenge of creating learning environments that capture pupils' interest and sustain their attention. Game-based activities address this challenge by transforming the learning process into an engaging and enjoyable experience "Play is the work of the child." quoted Montessori, M [4]. Through games, learners are provided with meaningful contexts that stimulate curiosity, foster intrinsic motivation, and increase active participation. As a result, students develop a greater interest in the English language and demonstrate a more positive attitude toward its learning, which ultimately contributes to more effective language acquisition. The scientist-pedagog Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi who continued Comenius's ideas of visual learning and active participation and used elements of play to develop thinking, speech, and emotions [5].



In addition to the use of game-based activities, teachers must adopt a modern approach to education and remain familiar with contemporary teaching methodologies and educational technologies. Being aware of innovative instructional strategies enables teachers to design a variety of active and inclusive games that engage all primary school learners, rather than only a small number of students. Effective game-based activities should encourage participation from every child in the classroom and support cooperative learning. Furthermore, the use of visually rich materials, such as colorful resources, pictures, and flashcards featuring animals, professions, or everyday objects, can significantly enhance learners' interest and comprehension. Such visual elements help create an engaging learning environment and support vocabulary acquisition among young ESL learners. For instance: James Paul Gee and Kurt Squire, who explore digital games for deeper learning, problem-solving, and cultural shifts in education [6] [7].

Moreover, the effectiveness of game-based learning can be further enhanced through the integration of digital tools and multimedia resources. Interactive applications such as Kahoot(CEO Eilert Giertsen Hanoa), Bamboozle, Blooket, educational software, and online games provide dynamic and adaptive learning experiences that can cater to different proficiency levels, learning styles, and individual needs [8]. By combining traditional classroom games with technology, teachers can create hybrid learning environments that sustain learners' attention, promote self-directed exploration, and encourage problem-solving skills. Also, there are so many books from which teachers can find lots of games for children. For instance: in a book named 101 Pep-up Games for Children :

Refreshing, Recharging, Refocusing written by Allison Bartl provides an extensive collection of games specifically designed for primary school learners, containing more than 100 activities with detailed explanations and creative ideas, some incorporating music [9]. The book offers games suitable for whole-class participation, small groups, and paired activities, ensuring that all learners can be actively involved. It also provides practical guidance on the requirements for each game, including necessary materials, the use of music, adequate space, and the benefits of outdoor play in the fresh air.



These resources are very helpful for ESL teachers because they help create fun, varied, and inclusive activities that encourage children to learn English, stay motivated, and work together.

METHODOLOGY

Jan Amos Comenius theoretically justified the idea that learning should be natural, engaging, and based on activity, laying the foundation for the use of play in education. Building on Comenius's pedagogical principles, Friedrich Froebel was the first to translate this theory into practice by systematically implementing play as the core method of teaching in kindergartens through structured games and educational materials. There are numerous definitions of the term *game* in educational literature (Celce-Murcia & McIntosh; Hadfield; Khan; Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby,). For instance, Hadfield describes a game as "An activity with rules, a goal, and an element of fun." [10]. In this paper, a game is understood as a purposeful and enjoyable activity regulated by rules. Language games may be classified according to various criteria. Hadfield proposes two main classifications of language games. First, she distinguishes between linguistic games, which primarily emphasize accuracy, and communicative games, which focus on the effective exchange of information. Her second classification is more detailed and generally incorporates both linguistic and communicative elements. The use of games in education is based on the idea that learning becomes more effective when students are actively involved in the process. Game-based methodology creates a learning environment in which learners are motivated to participate, experiment, and interact, rather than passively receive information. In an educational context, games encourage cooperation, problem-solving, and critical thinking while reducing anxiety and fear of making mistakes. This methodology supports learner-centered instruction, where students take an active role in constructing knowledge through experience. Here are some methods of gaming in education that can be successfully used in every school to energize or motivate students:



Animal Movement Game: The animal movement game is an engaging warm-up activity for young ESL learners. In this game, the teacher gives instructions such as “Move like an elephant,” “Jump like a spider,” or “Run like a lion,” and pupils perform the actions. This game supports the development of basic vocabulary, especially animal names and action verbs. By combining language with physical movement, pupils remember new words more easily. The activity also improves listening comprehension, as learners must understand and follow simple instructions in English. When pupils take turns giving instructions, they practice speaking skills, pronunciation, and confidence. In addition, the game enhances motor skills, coordination, and social interaction, making learning active and enjoyable [11].

“Simon Says” Game: The “Simon Says” game is a well-known warm-up activity used to revise familiar action verbs such as listen, look, touch, clap, stand up, and sit down. Pupils perform actions only when the instruction begins with “Simon says.” This game strongly develops listening and attention skills, as pupils must carefully listen and decide whether to act or not. It reinforces understanding of classroom commands and improves concentration [12].

Flashcards and “Point to” Game (Colors): In this activity, the teacher uses flashcards to review colors. Each time a flashcard is shown, the teacher asks the question “What color is it?” and then plays a “Point to” game, where pupils point to objects of the named color. This activity helps pupils practice color vocabulary and basic question–answer structures. It develops listening comprehension and speaking skills, as learners listen to the color name and respond verbally or physically. The use of visual materials improves visual recognition, attention, and memory. The activity also encourages active participation and interaction in the classroom [13].

Zoo Animal Mime and True/False Game: The teacher introduces the activity by saying, “Let’s go to the zoo. What can we see?” and names an animal for pupils to mime. Students act out the animal using body movements and gestures. After miming, pupils make a simple sentence about the animal. The rest of the class



listens and decides whether the sentence is true or false, for example: “Snakes have got legs.” (False.) This activity promotes kinesthetic learning and active participation. It reinforces animal vocabulary and basic sentence structures while developing listening comprehension and logical thinking through the true/false element. The game also encourages speaking confidence, creativity, and positive classroom interaction [14].

Guess the Picture: In this warmer activity, the teacher draws a simple picture of a fruit or a vegetable on the board, pausing after drawing each line so that pupils can guess what is being drawn. Once the picture is complete, the teacher points to it and says, “Look! It’s a ...” and pauses for students to complete the sentence with the correct word (e.g., apple, banana, carrot). This activity develops observation and prediction skills while reinforcing vocabulary related to fruits and vegetables. It encourages students to speak and complete simple sentences, supporting early language production [15]. Methodological note: It is recommended that the teacher uses colourful markers or chalks when drawing. The use of different colours makes the picture clearer, more visually appealing, and more engaging for young learners. This helps pupils recognize the objects more easily and increases motivation, making the activity both more effective and enjoyable.

According to their framework, several of the previously mentioned games can be categorized under broader types. For instance, **movement games** involve physical activity on the part of learners, such as Find your partner. **Task-based games** typically require students to work in pairs or groups on meaningful tasks that they find enjoyable. In these activities, learners follow clear rules and have the opportunity to practice all language skills, while the teacher assumes the role of organizer and facilitator. This classification emphasizes both the pedagogical purpose and the interactive nature of games in language learning. Finally, Jacobs proposes an additional distinction among language games [16]. He categorizes them into **competitive games**, where learners strive to be the first to achieve a goal, and **cooperative games**, in which learners work together to reach a shared objective and support one another. Jacobs also suggests that competitive games can be adapted to reduce the competitive aspect while incorporating cooperative



elements. In his paper, he provides several concrete examples of such games, drawing on evidence from the existing literature.

Many surveys also proved that the games have a positive and effective influence on the learning of foreign languages:

- games get students involved in their learning; they motivate them;
- games encourage creative and spontaneous use of language (Chen) [17];
- games introduce a change in formal learning situations;
- games unconsciously promote and practise all four basic language skills, such as listening, reading, speaking and writing;
- games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005) [18];
- games are student-centred;
- games can promote collaboration among students;

The appropriate usage of games in education: The language teachers must seriously consider when to use games, which of them to use and how to use them appropriately, purposefully and efficiently in order to meet both students' needs and lesson objectives. According to Jacobs, games have traditionally been incorporated into language classes as warm-up activities at the start of lessons, as filler exercises when there is extra time at the end, or occasionally to add variety and interest to the

curriculum. However, when approached as meaningful opportunities for language practice, games can serve a more substantial role. They can be used to follow up on recently taught material, allowing students to practice and reinforce newly acquired skills or knowledge. Additionally, games can facilitate the review and recycling of previously learned content or function as an informal assessment tool to identify areas where students may need further support in their language development. Furthermore, teachers need to take into account students' individual learning styles, their readiness to

cooperate, and their current mood, as learners may be tired or simply not inclined to participate in a game at a given moment. Organizing any game-based activity places significant demands on the teacher. They must carefully prepare the game content and necessary materials, clearly explain the rules, and allocate



appropriate time for the activity. Introducing the game effectively is essential to prevent misunderstandings and ensure that students fully understand how to participate and benefit from the activity.

(Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby). Teachers must:

- explain the rules of the game to students;
- demonstrate with the help of one or two learners parts of the game;
- write on the board any key language and/or instruction;
- trial the game;
- play the game.

RESULTS

Interactive and playful activities in the language classroom provide significant theoretical and practical benefits. They actively engage students, enhancing vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and memory retention through meaningful and enjoyable participation. These activities promote quick thinking, attention to detail, and the development of cognitive and social skills, including communication, cooperation, empathy, and creativity. Additionally, they support the reinforcement of grammar and language structures while fostering self-confidence and reducing anxiety in a supportive, student-centered environment. Overall, such game-based approaches offer a dynamic and effective methodology for practicing and internalizing language skills in a motivating and immersive way.

CONCLUSION

Taking everything into account, this research has shown that interactive and playful activities in the language classroom are highly effective for primary students. They engage learners, enhance vocabulary and grammar acquisition, and promote cognitive, social, and emotional development. Overall, the findings highlight that thoughtfully designed game-based learning can significantly improve language skills while fostering motivation, collaboration, and self-confidence in young learners.



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