

What are the Attitudes of Young Learners Toward the use of Games at a Foreign Languages Center in Cao Lanh City?

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ABSTRACT

These days, games have been seen as an effective tool for teaching and learning English, especially for young learners. Therefore, this study aims to find out the attitudes of young learners towards the use of games. The instrument of this research comprised a 4-scale questionnaire with 11 items. The respondents were 42 students at a foreign languages center. The findings showed that all the participants (100%) liked playing games. Additionally, most of the respondents (88%) acknowledged the useful role of games in terms of helping them memorize the lesson better. Moreover, the considerable majority of students (85%) expressed that they felt happy when playing games. The results also suggested that when deploying games in class, teachers should take learners' competence into account so as to maximize educational effectiveness. Then, pedagogical implications and recommendations are presented in order to encourage the use of games.

Keywords: young learners, games, attitudes,

1 Introduction

Nowadays, the demand for cooperation and development between countries has sharply been increasing. Therefore, English has played a significant role as an international language. Thanks to English, people can communicate and work together around the world, especially, English helps eminent scientists who have different languages to cooperate to study and invent many great achievements. Because of the reasons above, the demand for learning English is also increased in non-speaking English generally and in Vietnam specifically. Many parents tend to let their children start studying English earlier. Furthermore, many primary schools have started to teach English for grade one students. Amazingly, the majority of children seem to enjoy learning English. They tend to be eager to participate in the English class. Many people believe that the early young learners study in English, the more successful they gain in the future. Thus, teaching for young learners is a concerned matter among teachers, parents and society.

In order to maximize the efficiency of children's teaching and learning, many useful approaches have suggested by educational scholars to deal with teaching children difficulties. Besides, many teachers find it hard to activate the educational awareness of young learners because of their age. So students' feeling is taken into account. Therefore, teachers apply many techniques to stimulate and encourage students' learning spirits like games, songs and puzzles. Among these activities, games are popularly used because of its outstanding advantages. They promote learners' awareness of the importance of teamwork which helps develop their character and skills. Every game needs a winner, so students will try their best to win. Games create a challenging environment, but students usually do not feel much pressure or tension because most of them tend to enjoy games. In addition, games enhance various skills such as speaking, writing, listening and reading. Shy as some students may be, they are eager to participate in the games they are playing. As many meaningful contexts are created for language use in games, they are viewed as the efficient way to help students remember the lesson longer because students have strong impressions as they study and play at once.



1.1 Background

There are many studies research the role of games in language teaching. Researchers have provided persuasive reasons why games should be used in class. Games have been studied and developed to serve as a scientific purpose. However, depending on the specific lessons and learners, games are closely applied in order to maximize its efficiency. In contrast, several scholars argue that games have some disadvantages. They claimed that games also make students stressed and anxious because of learners' competition. Obviously, games provide many positive results in language teaching. However, it needs plenty of time to have the overall view of game effects. So this research aims to investigate the attitudes of young learners, especially a questionnaire will be implemented to collect learners' attitudes.

The names and how they are done are given and explained as follows:

1. Word guessing: there are 2 teams; one person from each team stands back to the board and guess what the teacher writes on the board from their teammate's explanations.
2. Stop the bus: the class is divided into 2 or 3 groups; 3 or 4 topics are given at the same time on the board and each time the teacher gives a letter, students have to find words that start with that letter for the topics given. When they finish, they say stop the bus.
3. Describe the objects: there are 2 teams. A small bag is given with some objects in it. Students will put their hand in the bag, feel the objects and describe to their teammates.
4. Chain games: there are 2 teams. They will take turns to shout out words that start with the final letter of the word from the other team.
5. Change chairs. The whole class will change chairs when a member says something that is true to them. It usually goes as: "change chairs if you..."
6. Simon says: the teacher will say "Simon says..." and students will follow what he say. Otherwise, if the teacher just say the action without the phrase "Simon says...", students are not allowed to do it.
7. Miming: there are 2 teams. Students will use action to tell their teammates what the words are.
8. Running dictation: the class is divided into groups of 4. The teacher will stick some papers with a short paragraph around the classroom and students will send one member of their groups to go and read and retell them what is written on the paper.
9. Drawing dictation: the teacher will read a description of a picture and students will listen and draw accordingly.
10. Pyramid: a pyramid is drawn on the board and divided into small parts with the points in each part. The higher it goes, the more marks it gives. Students will answer questions given by the teacher to gain points for their team.

1.2 Research Questions

This paper aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are students' perceived attitudes towards the use of games in the classroom?
2. What are the popular games among students?

2 Literature review

In teaching field, games are pedagogical activities. Based on previous studies, there are many definitions of games. According to Griffiths and Clyne (1995), a game is an enjoyable distraction in which students' skills are tested by a set of rules. In addition, Allery (2004) stated that a game may be defined as a competitive activity. Every definition seems to present specific strengths of games.

Using language games is one useful strategy to motivate learning a foreign language. According to Deersi (2002), games offer an opportunity for real communication. Using games, based on the same study, also

draws students' attentiveness. To continue with this idea, playing is vital to the development of young learners' brain since children's creativity is enhanced by playing (Pound, 2005). Moreover, students prefer to participate in a game-teaching environment which is considered as a meaningful tool to activate their interest in English learning. In addition, the same conclusion was also advocated by Kou's (2008) research which indicated that games help learners improve their oral competence. Based on the studies mentioned above, the significance of using game in language teaching appears to be well supported.

Besides, according to Atake (2003), learners can perceive and grasp vocabulary more quickly and easily by doing gestures during game playing. When they use their actions to demonstrate the word, they automatically realize what that word means. Thanks to this activity, children can acquire a considerable amount of meaningful vocabulary. Furthermore, games are designed to assist students memorize and utilize a language more efficiently (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) because students are strongly impressed by competing or interacting in games. Additionally, games create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom. Schultz and Fischer (1988) believed that when students play games, they relax and have fun. Without worry and stress, students can enhance their fluency by communicative activities which can transform a boring class into an exciting class. The above studies proved that games play a critical role in language teaching.

In contrast, there are several studies which claimed that using games in English learning has some disadvantages. Chuang (2007) argued that games make children nervous and depressed because of the strong competition in games. Some students do not want to be defeated and they tend to refuse to participate in games. According to Chuang (2007), children feel anxious as they worry about being blamed by their team members. Additionally, Wu (2002) and Zeng (2005) also stated that playing games can be considered as the cause of children's anxiety and peer pressure. Finally, the above studies show negative aspects of using games in English learning.

In summary, based on previous studies, student motivation, and vocabulary are achieved by using games to teach young learners because fun activities can easily attract their attention. However, there are some weaknesses of games regarding students' anxiety and pressure. In order to determine the impact of games in English teaching, the following question was explicitly addressed in this research: what are the attitudes of young learners concerning the use of games?

To have the perspective of young learners in terms of using games in English teaching, a questionnaire survey was implemented in this study.

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Participants

The subjects in this research were 42 EFL students aged between 10 and 12 from a foreign languages center. Most of them started studying English from grade two. Students were purposely chosen from two classes of the researcher. Thus, the students are quite familiar with playing games while learning English. Besides, they had exposures to the games included in the questionnaire. The purpose of this study was presented to young learners and they were asked to complete the questionnaire to show their attitudes on the use of games in English class.

3.2 Materials and Instrument

Different authentic materials such as articles, websites were selected to utilize in this study. The material was adapted to be suitable with the demand of the classroom.

In this study, questionnaire was utilized to investigate the attitudes of young learners towards using games in class. There are 11 items on the questionnaire. The first 2 items asked about personal information of respondents. The next 8 items were composed to deal with students' attitude, regarding using games in

class. Besides, in order to find out which games are preferred, a list of 10 popular games was written into 1 table item on the questionnaire. The last open-ended question was applied to give students a chance to indicate their favorite games. For each multiple item, the respondents were provided four response options (1 = “strongly disagree”, 2 = “disagree”, 3 = “agree”, 4 = “strongly agree”). Students were given the questionnaire in a Vietnamese version because most of them are English learning beginners.

4 Results

The purpose of this research was to find out the attitudes of students towards using games in class. Details of the data on students’ attitudes are presented in Table 1 below. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 1: *Students’ attitudes toward using games in class*

Items	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
1. You like playing games in your class.	0	0	19	81
2. Games are a kind of speaking practice.	2	5	19	74
3. Games are a kind of listening practice.	2	0	24	74
4. You feel nervous when playing games	69	26	5	0
5. Games help you remember your lessons better.	0	12	14	74
6. Games are a waste of time.	79	14	5	2
7. You are happy when playing games.	0	14	33	52

Regarding students’ perspective as a whole, the considerable majority of them had positive attitudes towards using games in class.

Initially, the students in this study were asked about their favor of using games in class. Surprisingly, all of the participants (100%) agreed to the statement that they liked playing games their class. It is also interesting to find that games were considered as a kind of speaking and listening practice, with 93% and 98% of the respondents respectively. Besides, it is noticeable when most of the participants (approximately 90%) disagreed to the item that games are a waste of time. In response to the statement that games helped students remember their lessons better, 88% of the participants expressed their agreement. In addition, another noteworthy outcome was that most of respondents (85%) felt happy when playing games. In short, the findings showed that using games in English teaching received positive attitudes from students in this study.

Besides, this study also aimed to find out which games is preferred by students. Details of the figure on students’ perspective toward the 10 common games are presented in Table 2 below. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 2: *Students' reactions toward the 10 common games in class*

Games/ students' reactions	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
1. Word guessing	0	17	36	48
2. Stop the bus	17	24	31	29
3. Describe the objects	29	43	12	17
4. Chain games	5	14	29	52
5. Change chairs	0	0	36	64
6. Simon says	21	38	31	10
7. Miming	12	17	24	48
8. Running dictation	0	0	38	62
9. Drawing dictation	17	52	14	17
10. Pyramid	2	45	31	21

With regard to students' favorite games, change chairs, running dictation, word guessing, chain games and miming were the most favorite games, reported by 100%, 100%, 83%, 81% and 71% of the respondents respectively. In contrast, describe the objects and drawing dictation received low votes, standing at 29% and 31% of the participants respectively.

5 Discussion

On the whole, the overall findings showed that this group of students had positive attitudes concerning the use of games in their English class. Most of students were aware that they were given a chance to practice speaking and listening skill which are considered vital factors in order to communicate in the target language. This result supported the previous study (Deersi ,2002), indicating that games offer an opportunity for real communication. In addition, this outcome is also congruous with Kou's (2008) indication in that games help learners improve their oral competence. Although the students in this study were young learners, they realized that games are an exciting kind of practice. Obviously, in order to participate in playing games, students have to listen to the instruction or question carefully and tell their answers with the correct pronunciation. Understanding the factor to be the winner, young learners tend to pay attention to listening and speaking activities of the lessons. Moreover, game activities can help teachers to create many exciting context so as to engage learners to give information or express their own views. This is an efficient technique for teachers to activate students' linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar point and language use in meaningful contexts.

Furthermore, it was found that most of the respondents acknowledged that games helped them memorize their lessons better, which is consistent with Richards and Rodgers's (2001) finding. Indeed, games not only provide learners opportunities to utilize their knowledge, but create many strong impressions for them. While playing games, students need to interact and cooperate to accomplish the requirements of games. Hence, the interaction between students or students and teacher is increased. To continue with this point,

interaction is seen as one of the most important technique so as to consolidate the previous lessons. Therefore, the knowledge which helps students or their team to be the winner in the games tends to stay with them longer.

Besides, most of the participants expressed that they felt happy when playing games, which is opposite to Chuang's (2007) study. Though there were also some students felt unhappy while playing games, the majority of them found it happy. In order to deal with students' feeling, teacher should consider closely choosing the appropriate games. Forcing students to participate in games they do not like may cause students' unhappiness. However, games were still efficient activities to make students happy. As a result, students had a good impression about games. Thus, teacher can utilize games to engage students to the lessons or to revise the previous lessons.

In addition, it was also found that the majority of the participants liked change chairs, running dictation, word guessing, chain games and miming more than other games. These are also the five games in which students are required little about linguistic ability to participate in. The rules of these five games are quite simple. On the contrary, the games that require much about linguistic competence or specific skills were not the kind of students' choices such as describe the objects and drawing dictation. While many average students found it difficult to describe an object, the majority of students had a tendency to hesitate to participate in drawing dictation because of their lack of confidence in drawing. This finding provided a detailed reflection on the reactions of students regarding each kind of games. Obviously, different games received varied favor. Therefore, teacher should observe scrupulously students' reaction so as to avoid using the games which are not preferred.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Pedagogical implications

First of all, this study showed that all participants (100%) expressed that they liked playing games in their class. Besides, the majority of students (85%) agreed to the statement that they felt happy when playing games. Generally, most of the respondents had positive attitudes concerning the use of games in the classroom. Therefore, games could be used to engage students to the lessons or encourage their study.

Furthermore, most of the participants found games as the useful way to practice listening and speaking. So, games not only deal with the students' psychology, but meet the demand of their study. As a result, games are recommended to apply to teaching and learning English.

6.2 Recommendations for further research

As mentioned above, this research surveyed a small number of students. So, the number of subjects should be increased. In addition, the attitudes could change depending on the age. So, it is recommended to investigate their perspectives with different ages of young learners.

Besides, this study was limited about discovering the particular attitudes of students due to the lack of interviews. Thus, interviews should be included in the instruments for future studies.

Furthermore, the ultimate purpose of this research was to find out the attitudes of young learners towards the use of games. However, in order to have a whole picture of the use of games, the effectiveness of games for young learners' acquisition should be concerned.

7 Declarations

7.1 Study Limitations

The first limitation of this study was that the consequence based on a group of young learners at a primary school in Viet Nam only. However, attitude is a psychological element affected much by culture. Thus, this result may not be applicable for other groups of people who come from different countries.

7.2 Acknowledgements

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7.3 Publisher's Note

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