TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH GAMES

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Abstract: *This article explores the pedagogical benefits of incorporating games into English language teaching (ELT). It examines the theoretical underpinnings of gamification in education, focusing on its effectiveness in enhancing motivation, engagement, and language acquisition. The article discusses various types of games suitable for different language skills and levels, provides practical examples, and addresses potential challenges and considerations for implementing game-based learning in ELT classrooms.*

Keywords: *English language teaching (ELT), games, gamification, language acquisition, motivation, engagement, communicative competence, vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, fluency development.*

Traditional language teaching methods often rely heavily on rote memorization and repetitive exercises, which can lead to disengagement and demotivation among learners. In contrast, game-based learning offers a more engaging and enjoyable approach, capitalizing on the inherent human desire for play. This article argues that incorporating games into English language teaching (ELT) can significantly enhance learners' motivation, participation, and ultimately, their language proficiency. This ludic approach leverages the principles of game mechanics and design to create a more dynamic and effective learning experience.

There are numerous meanings of the term "game" (see, for example, Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005; Hadfiled, 1998; Khan, 1991; Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1979). For instance, Hadfield (1998: 4) describes a game as an activity that has a goal, rules, and a fun component. According to the author's description, the game is viewed in this study as a purposeful, enjoyable pastime that is subject to rules. There are various ways to categorise the language games. Hadfiled (1998) divides language games into two categories. She separates them into communicative games, which are orientated on effective information exchange, and linguistic games, which primarily concentrate on accuracy. More categories make up Hadfiled's second classification, which typically incorporates both linguistic and communicative elements. (Hadfiled, 1998, as referenced in Jacobs, n.d. b) These games are as follows:

Games can be sorted, ordered, or arranged. As an illustration, students sort a deck of cards featuring various products into categories such as department shop and grocery store products.

Games of information gaps. In these games, one or more players possess knowledge that other players require to finish a task. One person may, for example, have a drawing, and their partner must draw something comparable while listening to the details provided by the drawing's creator.

Guessing games. These are a variation on information gap games. One of the best known examples of a guessing game is 20 questions, in which one person thinks of a famous person, place, or thing. The other participants can ask 20 yes/no questions to find clues in order to guess who or what the person is thinking of.

Search games. These games are yet another variant on two-way information gap games, with everyone giving and seeking information. Find Someone Who is a well-known example. Students are given a grid. The task is to fill in all the cells in the grid with the name of a classmate who fits that cell, e.g. someone who is a vegetarian. Students circulate, asking and answering questions to complete their own grid and help classmates complete theirs.

Matching games. As the name implies, participants need to find a match for a word, picture, or card. For example, students place 30 word cards, composed of 15 pairs, face down in random order. Each personturns over two cards at a time, with the goal of turning over a matching pair, by using their memory.

Labelling games. These are a form of matching, in that participants match labels and pictures.

Exchanging games. In these games, students barter cards, other objects, or ideas.

Board games. Scrabble is one of the most popular board games that specifically highlights language.

Role play games/dramas. Role play can involve students playing roles that they do not play in real life, such as dentist, while simulations can involve students performing roles that they already play in real life or might be likely to play, such as customer at a restaurant. Dramas are normally scripted performances, whereas in role plays and simulations, students come up with their own words, although preparation is often useful.

The effectiveness of games in language learning is supported by several theoretical frameworks:

7. Constructivism. Games encourage active learning and knowledge construction, as learners actively participate in the learning process, making connections and applying knowledge in context.

8. Cognitive Load Theory. Well-designed games can manage cognitive load by breaking down complex tasks into smaller, manageable chunks, providing immediate feedback, and creating a sense of accomplishment.

9. Motivation and Engagement. Games tap into intrinsic motivation, fostering a sense of enjoyment and accomplishment, leading to increased engagement and perseverance. The competitive element, even in cooperative games, can be highly motivating.

10. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Many games inherently promote communicative interaction, providing learners with opportunities to use the target language naturally and authentically in meaningful contexts.

Games can be adapted to target various language skills:

1. Vocabulary Acquisition. Bingo, vocabulary matching games, Pictionary, and memory games can effectively enhance vocabulary learning.

2. Grammar Practice. Board games incorporating grammar rules, sentence-building activities, and grammar-focused charades can reinforce grammatical structures.

3. Fluency Development. Role-playing games, debates, storytelling games, and improvisational activities foster fluency and spontaneous language use.

4. Listening and Speaking. Listening comprehension games (e.g., dictation games, listening comprehension quizzes with interactive elements), and speaking activities (e.g., storytelling, describing pictures, and presentations) can be easily gamified.

5. Reading and Writing. Escape rooms, online interactive stories, and creative writing prompts integrated into game scenarios can engage learners in reading and writing tasks.

Practical Examples

"City Tour" (Speaking and Vocabulary): Students work in groups, creating a travel brochure for a fictional city, using newly learned vocabulary related to places and activities.

"Grammar Bingo" (Grammar): Bingo cards feature grammatical structures; the teacher calls out sentences, and students mark the matching grammar on their cards.

"Story Chain" (Fluency): Students take turns adding a sentence to a collaborative story, building upon the previous contribution.

"Jeopardy!" (Vocabulary and Grammar): A classic game adapted for ELT, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, and cultural knowledge.

In conclusion, incorporating games into ELT offers a powerful pedagogical strategy for enhancing learner motivation, engagement, and language acquisition. By carefully selecting and adapting games to target specific language skills and addressing potential challenges, educators can create a dynamic and effective learning environment. The ludic approach emphasizes active participation, communicative interaction, and a more enjoyable learning experience, ultimately contributing to greater language proficiency and a more positive attitude towards learning English. Further research into the specific impact of different types of games on various aspects of language learning is warranted to further optimize the use of game-based learning in ELT.

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