THE EFFECT OF USING FUN ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR ELEMENTERY LEVELS

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Abstract. *The article investigate teaching foreign languages to primary school students can be challenging, as young learners require engaging and interactive methods to maintain their interest and enhance their retention. This article examines the impact of using engaging activities such as games, songs, stories and role-playing in teaching a foreign language at the primary level. The study shows how these activities contribute to improving young learners' vocabulary, improving pronunciation and increasing motivation. By incorporating engaging and interactive methods, teachers can create a positive learning environment that builds confidence and communication skills. The results show that engaging activities not only make learning more enjoyable, but also increase learners' language proficiency and retention in long-term memory. This study provides valuable insights for educators seeking effective strategies to improve foreign language teaching in early childhood education.*

Keywords: Fun activities, foreign language teaching, elementary education, interactive learning, language acquisition, games in education, motivation in learning, vocabulary development, student engagement.

Introduction

Acquiring a foreign language at the elementary level can be a challenging task for young learners, as they need to grasp new vocabulary, grammar rules, and pronunciation while staying motivated and engaged. Traditional teaching approaches often emphasize rote memorization and repetition, which may not always capture students' interest effectively. However, integrating enjoyable activities such as games, songs, role-playing, and storytelling into language lessons has been found to enhance student participation, improve retention, and create a more positive learning atmosphere. This research investigates the role of fun activities in teaching foreign languages to elementary students. It explores how interactive and engaging methods can facilitate language learning, build students' confidence, and inspire enthusiasm for acquiring a new language. By examining the advantages of incorporating playful techniques into language instruction, this study aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of a dynamic, learner-centered approach to foreign language education.

Young learners are typically defined as children aged five or six, who are just starting elementary school, up to twelve years old. However, age alone does not determine a child's level of maturity. According to Philips (1993), several factors influence a child's maturity, such as culture, gender, environment (urban or rural), and parental upbringing. Additionally, children's developmental pace varies—some develop quickly, while others need more time.

A skilled teacher should recognize these differences and consider them when selecting activities for their students. Rather than relying solely on physical age, teachers should base their decisions on children's interests, attitudes, and backgrounds. This essay focuses on young learners aged five to seven, who are at the beginning stage of schooling.
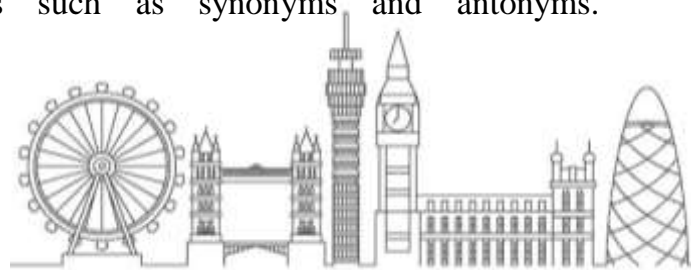
Teaching English to Young Learners

For children to effectively acquire English, they must be exposed to the language from an early age. Research suggests that young learners have an advantage over adults because they have more time to dedicate to learning and fewer responsibilities. Long-term exposure to a language in a natural setting enhances their ability to learn it. English is introduced at the elementary level for several reasons. Brumfit, Moon, and Tongue (1991) argue that early exposure to a language and its culture fosters tolerance and understanding of different people. Cameron (2001) identifies four key aspects teachers should consider when teaching English to young learners, in addition to their knowledge and skills.

First, teachers need to understand how young students think and learn. Second, they should identify children's interests and incorporate them into language lessons. Third, educators must be capable of teaching English literacy while ensuring that lessons are primarily delivered through spoken communication. Finally, teachers should be able to recognize and address challenges that arise during the learning process. Brown (2001) emphasizes that teachers should take into account the intellectual and developmental characteristics of young learners when planning lessons. Teaching Vocabulary

Young learners need to focus on various aspects of the English language, including pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. To develop proficiency in English, they must acquire a substantial vocabulary, as knowing words and their meanings is essential for improving language skills (Linse, 2005). According to Cameron (2001), children need to learn between one and two thousand words to effectively speak and write in English. This section will briefly explore how vocabulary is learned, followed by an overview of different methods and approaches to teaching it.

David Wilkins, a well-known linguist, emphasized that while limited grammar may still allow for some communication, vocabulary is fundamental to conveying meaning. Young learners begin by labeling objects as they develop their speaking skills, later advancing to categorizing words (Thornbury, 2002). Over time, they build connections between words, recognizing relationships such as synonyms and antonyms.

Several techniques can be used to teach vocabulary to young learners. One effective approach is using real objects, which help children visualize and retain words. Listening and repetition also play a key role in reinforcing new vocabulary. Another method is the direct approach, where translation is avoided, and only the target language is used in the classroom. Additionally, the Total Physical Response (TPR) method is widely used, as it incorporates movement and interactive activities, keeping children engaged and helping them learn words more efficiently. Since young learners tend to be energetic and have short attention spans, TPR allows them to acquire language naturally through games and physical activities.

Moreover, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach encourages young learners to use language meaningfully in context, emphasizing communication over rote memorization. This method helps children develop practical language skills while actively participating in conversations.

Teaching Vocabulary Through Games

Halliwell (1991) suggested that since young learners naturally possess creative language skills, teachers should provide an interactive learning environment that encourages self-expression. Since classroom activities often involve unpredictable language use, students should be guided to construct and use language actively. Games are particularly valuable in this process because they not only make learning enjoyable but also create opportunities for meaningful communication.

Using games to teach vocabulary requires skilled teachers who can effectively engage children in play while ensuring they grasp the linguistic elements of the language. According to Rixon (1981), teachers who understand the role of games in learning can design and implement activities that promote both language acquisition and enjoyment. This section will define the concept of games and discuss the benefits and drawbacks of using them in vocabulary instruction.

Jones (1980) described a game as an activity involving one or more players who either compete or collaborate according to specific rules. Rogers (1981) defined gaming as a structured, goal-oriented activity governed by rules, incorporating competition, and having a clear conclusion. Similarly, Gibbs (1981) described games as activities where participants make decisions cooperatively or competitively to achieve specific goals within a defined framework.

Rixon (1981) emphasized that games have a structured beginning and end, with a winner determining the conclusion. Games encourage both teamwork and competition, requiring players to use language actively. Young learners engage in communication by speaking, miming, using body movements, and employing gestures, making the learning experience both enjoyable and unpredictable.

Games play a crucial role in supporting young learners as they acquire language skills. They make lessons more engaging and help maintain students' interest and motivation.

Additionally, games foster an environment of meaningful communication, where learners interact before, during, and after the activity (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005).

Krashen (1985) noted that such interactive environments provide "comprehensible input," allowing students to absorb language through listening and reading. Similarly, Swain (1993) highlighted the concept of "comprehensible output," where learners practice speaking and writing. Furthermore, games introduce an emotional aspect to language learning, making lessons more dynamic and preventing them from becoming monotonous (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Ersoz, 2000).

By incorporating games into vocabulary lessons, teachers can create an enjoyable and interactive learning experience, making language acquisition more effective for young learners.

Explaining and Instructing the Game. Providing clear instructions is essential for ensuring that games achieve their intended learning objectives. Teachers play a crucial role in this process, as they must clearly explain the rules and purpose of each game so students understand how to play and apply the targeted vocabulary.

If the teacher fails to provide clear guidance, using games as a teaching method may lead to wasted class time. Students who do not understand the game will quickly lose interest, resulting in minimal learning outcomes. Therefore, thorough explanations and well-structured instructions are necessary to maximize the effectiveness of games in vocabulary instruction.

Conclusion. When incorporating games into vocabulary instruction for young learners, teachers need to be patient and creative in selecting engaging methods to ensure students enjoy the learning process. Games serve as an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition, making learning more enjoyable and memorable. As discussed earlier, several games—such as Hot Potatoes, Memory Challenge, Last One Standing, Pictionary, and Bingo—can be used to enhance vocabulary learning.

Teachers should carefully consider the time available and necessary materials when selecting or designing games. While games have both benefits and drawbacks, their use can make learning fun and help students retain new words more effectively. However, despite their popularity among young learners, games should not be overused. They must be chosen based on students' proficiency level, interests, and the learning context. Additionally, games should align with the lesson topic and target vocabulary. Any game can be highly effective when it is appropriately selected, well-structured, and guided by a skilled and knowledgeable teacher.

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