Peculiarities and Advantages of Teaching English through Games

Susanna Asatryan[1]

Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, Armenia[1]

Abstract

*Games and fun activities are a vital part of English teaching classes. Embracing rules and elements of fun, they must be an integral component of the language syllabus, as a technique with clear goals, objectives, tasks and expected outcomes. Games are a good way of practicing language. They motivate learners, promote classroom interaction,improve learners' language acquisition and their communicative skills. Games can be used at all stages of the language instruction from controlled to free practice. Games can also serve as a diagnostic tool for teachers to note and specify the areas of difficulty and take appropriate constructive actions. Sometimes students are lazy and none motivated to do their tasks. So for this account games lead the learners for participation in different activities, they get a chance to practice or use the new language items (vocabulary, grammar structures and rules, phonetic items) they have just learnt eagerly and willingly instead of forcing them to do as a task. The most particular effective point is that learners play and learn at the same time. Games motivate learners, encouraging their teamwork solidarity. So while considering games as a technique we come across with the following factors, such as **rules, competition, relaxation, learning**. The main focus of using game in class is not only to help students learn more effectively but also have fun. So before playing game in the classroom, it is necessary to explain clearly its rules to the learners.*

Keywords: *teaching technique, classification of games, linguistic games, communicative games, interaction, learner motivation, language acquisition.*

Games are an integral part of language teaching instructions. Based on the purpose and objectives of the performance, we identify many kinds of game with different topics and for the learners with different levels of their language proficiency.

Generally, in contemporary foreign language teaching methodology games are divided into two main types:

Linguistic games - Focus is on language accuracy (vocabulary/grammar/spelling/phonology games).

Communicative games - Focus is on meaningful exchange of information, ideas, and messages.

According to Hadfield's classification, there are more games that contain elements of more than one type [3].

Lee suggests the following types of game classification [5].

- structure games
- vocabulary games
- spelling games
- pronunciation games
- number games
- listen-and-do games
- role play and simulation
- discussion games.

Mc Callum provides another classification:

- structure games
- vocabulary games
- number games
- spelling games
- conversation games
- writing games
- role play and drama [6].

Games can be used to teach or to assimilate the learners' language knowledge and communicative skills. Therefore, while choosing this or that type of game teachers must be careful, so that both learners and teachers can benefit the most from these games. The important thing is-to clarify and specify goals and objectives before the performance.

Information Gap games: One or more pupils have information and others need to complete a task. For instance, one person might have a drawing and their partner needs to create a similar drawing by listening to the information given by the partner with the drawing.

Information Gap games can involve an one-way information gap, such as the drawing game just described, or a two-way information gap, in which each person has unique information.

For Information-Gap activities to work, it is vitally important that students understand the details of the task and interact [7; p.63-65]. From this perspective project work is another good example to motivate the learners for collaboration, promoting both authentic language use and interaction.

Guessing games. These are a variation of 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.

Matching games. As the name suggests, participants need to find a match for a word, picture or card.

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

Board games. These games are mostly aimed at focusing on the target language knowledge.

Role-play games. The term "**Role play**" is generally used to refer to a wide range of practice and communicative activities. Some of the controlled or guided dialogues, especially cued dialogues, might be considered as an introduction to role play. These prepare learners to take part in role play activities which require greater spontaneity and fluency.

Byrne characterizes role-play with the following four features:

− **closeness**
− **situation**
− **realism**
− **personality** [1; p. 117-118].

Role-plays can be:

− **Controlled** - Participants are responsible for the language they use.
− **Semi-controlled** - Participants are partly expected to use the prescribed language.
− **Free** - Participants are responsible for the message not for the prescribed language.

Role play is not simply a rehearsal for real-life transactions. It provides learners with opportunities to practice correct and appropriate use of language functions, notions and structures in different contexts.

The ultimate aim of the role play, as of all speaking activities, is to involve learners in fluent and creative expression in a way which can and should be meaningful and enjoyable. This, as always, requires a supportive classroom atmosphere where learners are not afraid to speak and to act, the role play mask must provide some relief, particularly for shyer learners, from the intensity of teacher-centered activities.

Simulation involves learners in more creative activities. It usually covers complex structures and larger groups (of 6 to 20 students) where the entire group is working through an imaginary situation as a social unit. A common genre of simulation game specifies that all members of the group are shipwrecked on a "desert island." Each person has been assigned an occupation (doctor, carpenter, garbage collector, etc.) and perhaps some other mitigating characteristics (a physical disability, an ex-convict, thief, businessman etc.) Only a specified subset of the group can survive on the remaining food supply so the group must decide who will live and who will die. Both the role play and the simulation require careful planning and preparation.

A powerful variation of the Role-play is a Real-play. In this case, situations and one or more of the characters are drawn not from cards, but from a participant's own life [7; p.155-163].

Typically, one of the learners plays himself/herself. This person explains a context (e.g. from his/her life experience) to other learners, and then together they recreate the situation in class. The Real-play technique allows learners to practice language they need in their own life. Nowadays there exist the new interpretation of the real play, which is a Reality Show.

In the frame of this article we'll introduce several types of games that serve as corner-stones for structuring and implementing an interaction in the language classroom, they are:

Word Jumble Race

This game encourages team work competition in the classroom. It is perfect tool for practicing reading and writing skills and grammar.

Instructions:

− Write out a number of sentences, using different colours for each sentence, e.g., we suggest having 3-5 sentences for each team.

- Cut up the sentences so you have a handful of words.
- Put each sentence into hats, cups or any objects you can find, keeping each separate.
- Split your class into teams of 2, 3, or 4. You can have as many teams as you want but remember to have enough sentences to go around.
- Teams must now put their sentences in the correct order.
- The winning team is the first team to have all sentences correctly ordered.

Right Word, Wrong Place
It is a pretty tool for practicing learners' vocabulary and grammar skills. It is effective for the learners with different language proficiency levels [8; p. 21].
Instructions:
- Work in pairs.
- In each of the sentences below underline the two words which should change places with each other in order to make sense.

Example
- The park played in the children.
- The cinema went to the children.
- This time we week next will be in Paris.
- I French learning to speak am.
- Grass off the keep.
- Like you do watching television?

Hangman
This is a favourite for all students. No matter how many students are there in the classroom, this game is best used particularly at the start to warm the class up or at the end if we have got some time left over.
Instructions:
- Think of a word and write the number of letters on the board using dashes to show many letters there are.
- Ask students to suggest a letter. If it appears in the word, write it in all of the correct spaces. If the letter does not appear in the word, write it off to the side and begin drawing the image of a hanging man.
- Continue until the students guess the word correctly (they win) or you complete the diagram (you win).

Pictionary
This is another game that works well with any age group; children love it because they can get creative in the classroom, breaking the monotony of new language learning.
Pictionary can help students practice and brush up their vocabulary.
Instructions:
- Before the class starts, prepare a bunch of words and put them in a bag.
- Split the class into two teams and draw a line down the middle of the board.
- Give one team member from each team a pen and ask them to choose a word from the bag.
- Tell the students to draw the word as a picture on the board and encourage their team to guess the word.
- The first team to shout the correct answer gets a point.

Hot Seat
It is perfect tool for practicing speaking and listening skills, encouraging competition in the classroom and it allows students to build their vocabulary.
Instructions:
- Split the class into two or more teams.
- Elect one person from each team to sit in the Hot Seat, facing the classroom with the board behind them.
- Write a word on the board. One of the team members of the student in the hot seat must help the student guess the word by describing it. They have a limited amount of time and can not say, spell or draw the word.
- Continue until each team member has described a word to the student in the Hot Seat.

Find Someone Who…

This is an excellent game to practice and activate learners' speaking and listening skills, encouraging their vocabulary learning as well.

Instructions:

Every student takes a sheet of paper and walks around the room, asking the other students for information. The learners must interact only in English, using complete sentences.

To provide authenticity in class, the learners ask interesting questions related to real life events, situations, facts, for example:

Find someone who…

1. can play the piano _____
2. can read sign language _____
3. can make pizza _____
4. can sing well _____
5. can speak three languages _____

The teacher walks around the classroom and observes the learners to prevent them using repeated questions. They also focus their attention on the learners' mistakes, slips, or any kind of difficulties occurring in communication.

Two Truths and a Lie

This is a fun game and a brilliant ice breaker between students if they do not know one another. The game is excellent for practicing speaking skills and building up relations.

Instructions:

- Write three statements about yourself on the board, two of which should be lies and one true.
- Allow your students to ask you questions about each statement and then guess which one is the truth. If they guess correctly then they win.

You can also give your students time to write their own two truths and one lie.

- Pair them up and have them play again, this time with their list, with their new partner. If you want to extend the game and give students more time to practice their speaking/listening skills, you can rotate partners every five minutes.
- Bring the whole class back together and have students announce one new thing they learned about another student as a recap.

Cause and Effect Game

EFFECT	CAUSE
Jim was not able to go to soccer today.	Because he had the flu.
Mike spent all day in the kitchen.	Because all of his friends wanted him to make dinner for them.
She got 100 percent on the test.	Because she studied hard.
He had a stomachache.	Because he ate junk food.

When English as a Second Language (ESL) students begin to form more complex sentences, it's important for them to understand the relationships between phrases. Cause and effect phrases are essential because they allow the speaker to state reasons clearly and accurately.

In the example introduced below we use Cause and Effect to show the relationship between two facts, concepts, or events, in which one is the result of the other (or others).

For this activity we can offer the learners different examples to put the concept into context. We can provide students with an effect and they must provide the cause or vice versa, e.g.
To begin, write the following phrases on the board.

Effect

- Because Ann was late for class, _____.
- As a result of the low exam grades, _____.
- Mary was unable to write her report, therefore, _____.
- Due to the expensive meal, _____.

Cause

- The baby was crying because
- The car rolled off the road owing to

‒ Water was everywhere as a result of

Learners do this activity trying to make associations between different concepts, events or ideas. They find logical links between facts and results. On the other hand, they use the language they studied.

Prism

Today students need to develop a range of academic skills. They need to learn how to analyze information, look at things in new ways, formulate their own opinions, and express themselves clearly. Prism takes a fresh approach to EAP, by focusing strongly on critical and creative thinking, skills for academic life, and teaching the most useful language. Students can draw diagrams to generate concepts and ideas they are reading about, making logical links and connections, e.g.

PRISM - "THE QUEEN"
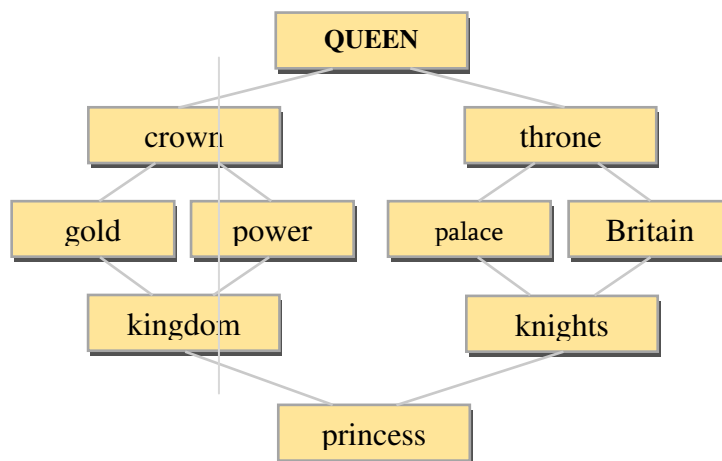
Brainstorming

This is another popular idea invention and problem solving technique. We use Brainstorming when need to find a creative idea or solutions for a problem.
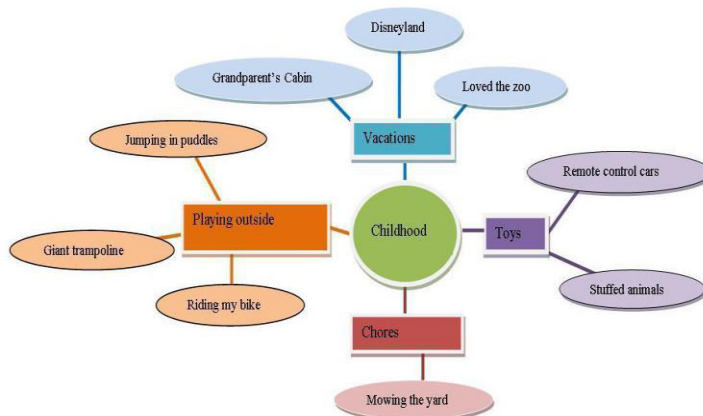
To Improve learners' brainstorming skills we should:
‒ start with a clear question or problem to generate ideas about
‒ focus on quantity, not quality
‒ not criticize other people's ideas
‒ not be a judge
‒ keep going
‒ set a goal.

Actually it is not possible to observe all language games and activities within one article. Teaching language through games is a vital topic for discussion and research. So with our interpretations we have tried to analyze games in teaching/learning process, highlighting their methodological peculiarities and advantages:

Games motivate learners.

Games are highly motivating and entertaining as they are amusing, interesting and at the same time challenging. Games raise students activation to move around, use their mental abilities. As a result they can transform a boring class into a challenging and interactive one. And in the line with Wright's and Buckby's theories, games help the teacher create a useful and meaningful language contexts in the classroom [9].

Games promote learners' interaction

Nowadays, in the era of communicative language teaching, interaction lies, in fact, in the heart of communication; it is what communication is supposed to be.

When playing games, students are trying to win or to beat other teams. Naturally, in this kind of activities learners interact a lot with one another.

Games improve learners' language acquisition

Thanks to the motivation and interaction created by games, students participate in the activity, have fun and learn at the same time. So they acquire language knowledge.

Games increase learners' language communicative competence

Communicative competence is the main goal of foreign language teaching methodology nowadays, supported by European plurilingual education policy. Games help learners develop their language learning and social skills. They provide a platform for meaningful context. Learners utilize basic communicative skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing, associated with the practice of language forms, elements, structures and rules. [2; p.7-9]. As a result, games increase learners' learning achievements maximizing interaction in class. As for the teachers- they use games in class to:

- create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
- develop a good relationship with the learners
- Increase learners linguistic self-confidence
- make language classes interesting
- personalize the learning process
- promote learner autonomy.

So games should be an integral part in language teaching syllabus. Through games language classes become relaxing, interesting, fun, enjoyable, interactive and effective.

References

[1] Byrne, D. Teaching Oral English. Longman, 1986
[2] Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, Modern Languages Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, Cambridge University Press, 2001
[3] Greenall S., Language Games and Activities, 1990, available at https://www.worldcat.org/title/language-games-and-activities
[4] Hadfield, J., Beginners' Communication Games. Longman, 1999
[5] Lee, W., Language teaching: Games and Contests. Oxford, 1991, available at https://www.google.com/search?q=5.+Lee%2C+W.%2C+Language+teaching
[6] Mc. Collum, 101 Word Games For Students Of English As A Second Or Foreign Language, available at https://cmc.marmot.org/Record/.b1162038
[7] Scrivener J., Learning Teaching, Pearson, Longman, 2008
[8] Watcyn-Jones P. Grammar Games and Activities for Teachers, PENGUIN Books, 1995
[9] Wright, A. Betteridge, D., Games for Language Learning (3rd ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2005