

Teaching English Through Games. Research Data and Findings

by Ligia-Daniela Botiza, “Inochentie Micu” High School & “Napoca” Technical College, Cluj-Napoca

Keywords: game-based learning, communication games, drills, vocabulary games, card games, information-gap games, television and radio games

Abstract

Teaching English Through Games presents playing in the classroom and its benefits, types of games. Methodology is divided in five parts.

Objective and hypothesis, states that primary school children can improve their English competence if their teacher uses games in teaching. *Research description*, presents the period, the participants and the method of the research. *Data collection – investigative instruments*, presents the way in which data were gathered, a series of observations, interviews and a questionnaire for assessing students` perception of learning English through games (see Appendix 1). *Data processing and data interpretation*, shows how data collected through observation, the above mentioned questionnaire and interviews were analysed. *Results* show that most primary school students learn best if their teacher uses games in the English lessons. This research shows that games are very useful for helping students develop their language skills. Teaching English through games is one of the most effective methods in primary school.



Why should we teach English through play?

Using games in the classroom has a lot of benefits. One of its benefits is the increased motivation of children to participate and to compete with each other in a cheerful and relaxed atmosphere. When students are involved in game-based activities, they are keen to participate and feel positive about the whole experience. Another benefit of using games in the classroom is the fact that it can be much fun and the students acquire new language without too much effort or stress. Communicative activities which involve games can help students to better remember the new learnt language and better fix it.

Types of games

There are two main types of communication games: *information-gap games* and *television and radio games*. There are a lot of television and radio games which can be successfully imported in the classroom: twenty questions, just a minute, call my bluff, fishbowl, drills, communication games, cards, Cuisenaire rods, vocabulary games etc. The games mentioned

above give students the chance to use humour and ingenuity in their answers, giving them a more memorable connection to the language. (Harmer, 2007) The following games were used in this research: twenty questions, just a minute, call my bluff and fishbowl.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

This research wants to show that primary school children can improve their English competence if their teacher uses games in teaching.

Hypothesis

The primary school children from will improve their English speaking and listening abilities if they are taught by using games.

Research description

Period

The research was implemented over a period of 6 months, from September 2020 to March 2021.

Participants

The participants are 59 primary school students. The students are aged between 6 and 12 years. They are divided as follows. There are 11 students in Preparatory Grade, 6 boys and 5 girls, 3 students in Ist Grade, 2 girls and a boy, 16 students in IInd Grade, 8 boys and 8 girls, 14 students in IIIrd Grade, 7 boys and 7 girls, and 16 students in IVth Grade, 8 boys and 8 girls. The classes are mixed in what regards gender and ability. Some students are beginners, others are at the elementary level, while others are already pre-intermediate.

Method

Games were used for developing students' vocabulary. The games were: 'Twenty questions', 'Just a minute', 'Call my bluff', 'Fishbowl'. After being taught through the games mentioned above, for a period of six months, in which the students were carefully observed and examined, the students were asked about their abilities to communicate in English through interviews and a questionnaire.

Data collection – investigative instruments

Observation

The students were observed during the 6 months of the study. Their English language speaking abilities improved after games were used in the English lessons.

Interviews

During the interviews, the students were asked about their abilities to communicate in English. The questions were the following: *How do you feel after your teacher uses games in the English lessons? Do you prefer game-based lessons or classical lessons?* Most of the students answered that they loved the lessons when they played. They prefer these types of lessons instead of the classical old ones.

Questionnaire

The students were asked to complete a questionnaire: *Questionnaire for assessing students' perception of learning English through games* (See Appendix 1). The questionnaire investigated their perception of the activities used in the English lessons, whether they liked games used in the lessons, whether they would recommend their friends to learn English through games and how they felt regarding their English competence after being taught English through games (see Appendix 1).

Data processing and data interpretation

All the 59 primary school students were carefully observed during the six months of the research. By the end of the nine months of study, the students were interviewed regarding the activities they had in the English lessons.

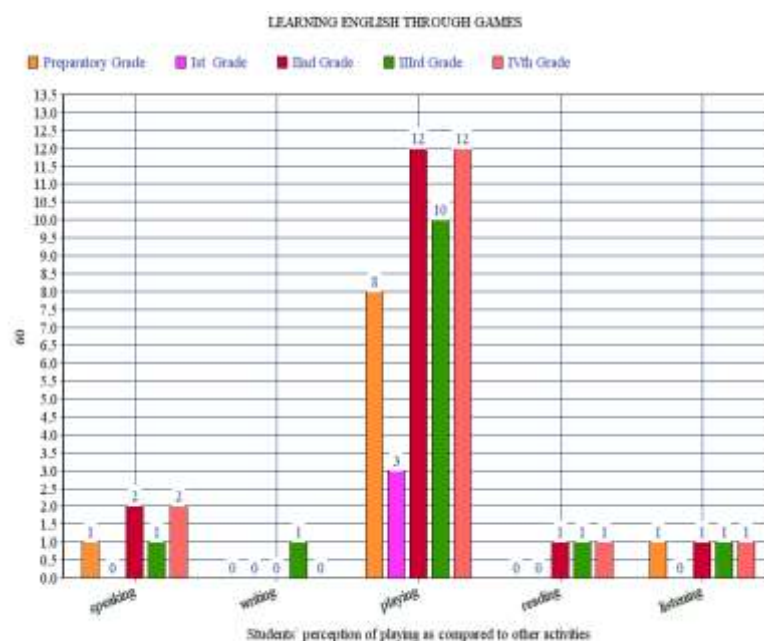
The students were then asked to complete a questionnaire: *Questionnaire for assessing students' perception of learning English through games* (See Appendix 1).

Results

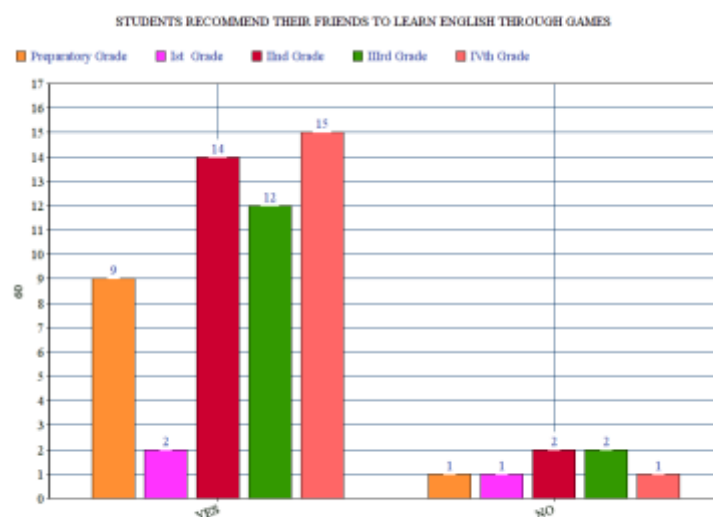
Daily observation showed that the students participated with great interest in playing games. They wanted to repeat these activities, to do the games again.

During the interviews, from the 59 students who participated in the research, 55 declared that they felt good during and after the English lessons in which they learnt through games and they improved their English speaking and listening abilities because they enjoyed the lessons which included games. Learning with pleasure and interest, they improved their English.

The first four questions of *Questionnaire for assessing students' perception of learning English through games* (see Appendix 1) measured students' perception of playing as compared to other types of activities used in the English lessons, like speaking, writing, reading and listening. Most students, 45 from the 59 participants from all the five primary school classes, chose playing as their favourite activity, 6 students chose speaking, 1 student chose writing, 3 students chose reading and 4 students chose listening, as the following chart shows.

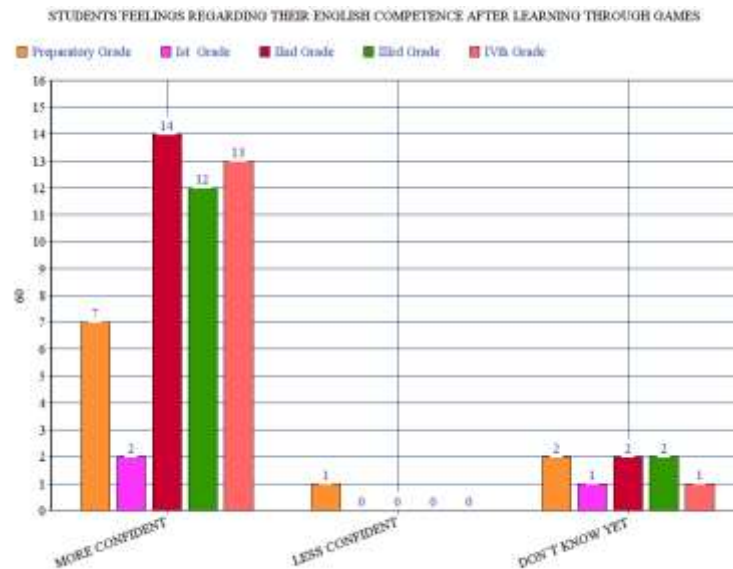


The fifth question of *Questionnaire for assessing students' perception of learning English through games* (see Appendix 1) was about students recommending learning English through games. From the 59 students involved in the research, 52 said that yes, they would recommend their friends to learn English through games. The other 7 students declared they wouldn't recommend their friends to learn English through games, as the following chart shows.



The sixth question of *Questionnaire for assessing students' perception of learning English through games* (see Appendix 1) measured students' feelings regarding their English competence after being taught through games. 50 of the 59 students feel more confident

regarding their English competence, 1 student feels less confident and 8 don't know yet, as the following chart shows.



Conclusions

Young children learn best if they like what they are being taught, the activities they are involved in and also their teacher. Primary school children are too young to learn for a definite aim because they don't know yet what they would do in the future, what abilities they have.

In this research, data collected through observation, interviews and the questionnaire: *Questionnaire for assessing students' perception of learning English through games* (see Appendix 1) show that students like learning English through games. They would also recommend their friends to learn English through games. Most participants involved in this research show that they feel more confident in their English competence after being taught through games.

The above-mentioned results have many implications for future teaching practice. If primary school students prefer learning English through games instead of being involved in speaking, writing, reading and listening, it means that we should provide a lot of comprehensible input through games. If games seem easier for the students, they get involved with more interest and they learn more than by being forced to read, write, listen or speak in a language they don't know yet. Games relax students and make them more willing to participate and learn.

A limit of the present study is that its participants are only primary school children. It would be interesting to see whether secondary school children learn better if they are taught by using games. But this may be the object of future studies.

All in all, we can say that teaching English through games in primary school is very effective as the present study shows. Children learn best by playing.

Bibliography

Harmer, J., (2007), *The Practice of English Language Teaching. Fourth Edition*, Harlow, England: Pearson Longman

<https://www.teachstarter.com/au/blog/10-benefits-playing-games-classroom/>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/playing-video-games-can-boost-exam-performance-oecd-claims-1.2127270>

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/why-classroom-games-can-be-much-more-lesson-fillers>

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/how-young-children-learn-english-through-play>

Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ASSESSING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH GAMES

1. Which of the following activities were mostly used in the English lessons:
a. speaking b. playing c. reading
2. I enjoyed the English lessons when our teacher asked us to:
a. read b. play c. write
3. I learn the most English when we:
a. speak b. read c. play
4. I understand most of the English lesson when we:
a. play b. listen c. speak
5. Would you recommend your friends to learn English through games?
a. yes b. no c. I don't know
6. During this year you learnt through games. How do you feel regarding your English competence?
a. more confident b. less confident c. I don't know

Biodata

Ligia-Daniela Botiza has been teaching English in public schools for 15 years. She is currently working with primary, secondary and high school students and she is passionate about teaching English through songs and games, developing the students` creativity, role playing in the English lesson and mentoring students. She has delivered workshops in conferences in Cluj-Napoca, Iași and Timișoara. She has been involved in POSDRU projects with her students: “Skills for Jobs” POSDRU/160/2.1/S/141384. Her research interests include: game-based learning, project-based learning and collaborative learning.