

***The Effect of Using Educational Games on the Students' Achievement in English Language for the Primary Stage***

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# ***Title: The Effectiveness of Games on Learning a Foreign Language***

## ***Abstract***

This study attempts to determine the role of educational games on learning a foreign language, and to compare games with more traditional practices as effective learning tools on the basic educational stage students at governmental schools in Jordan, an experimental research is conducted using three groups out of six randomly. To determine the relationship between learning a foreign language and educational games among the participants, a one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is performed based on achievement levels. For the relation between educational games and learning a foreign language a Pearson's Correlational analysis is used. The results of the post test for the experimental group are so better than the controlled one which show that games have a good effect on improving the achievement for the primary stage and to create an interactive environment. It is recommended to use games since they are very effective especially for the primary stages in teaching a second language and games are helpful for the teacher as a procedure for language acquisition.

## ***Introduction***

Language learning is a hard work. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. As we need meaningfulness in language learning, and authentic use of the language it is useful to follow and create many different techniques and procedures. That through creative procedure we can have an interactive environment which may lead to an improvement in learning a foreign language.

According to students' achievements we can asses through utilizing pre, and post tests if our students have improved or not, and if our procedure is useful, effective or not. Games and especially educational games are one of the techniques and procedures that the teacher may use in teaching a foreign

language. Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson.

A game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages, games should be used at all the stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way.

All agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom, since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence and generate fluency and may have a significant role in improving a second language acquisition.

## *Review of Literature*

One useful strategy to encourage learning a foreign language is using language games. When using games in the classroom, it is beneficial for teachers to have a complete understanding of the definitions of games, which usually are defined as a form of play concerning rules, competition, and an element of fun. Teachers should also consider the advantages of games: the ability to capture students' attention; lower students' stress; and give students the chance for real communication. Lastly teachers need to assess how to use games appropriately in the classroom. It is important to choose an appropriate time and integrate them into the regular syllabus and curriculum. However, because of the limitations of the syllabus, games often cannot be used, as much as they should be. Therefore, it may be challenging for teachers to try to add some games in class in order to develop students' English proficiency of the target language.

Some teachers think that language games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in classroom since games sometimes have been considered only for its one element that is fun. In fact, games can provide English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) students more than that. Among several strategies used to improve students' proficiency such as visual aids, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), drama, role-play, and so on, games are another useful strategy to promote students' language proficiency (Richard - Amato, 1996). This paper aims to give a clear understanding of what games are and why and how games are used in the classroom.

Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target Language. Well-Chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are

amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation.

"Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication." (Ersoz, 2000)

Language games are not activities mainly aimed to break the ice between students or to kill time. Byrne (1995) gave the definition to games as a form of play governed by rules. They should be enjoyed and fun. They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities, but a way of getting the learner to use the language in the course of the game. Similarly, Jill Hadfield (1990) defined games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun."

There are a great number of language games. So teachers have a variety of choices. However, in deciding which game to use in a particular class and which games will be most appropriate and most successful with their students, teachers must take many factors into account.

According to Carrier (1990) teachers should first consider the level of the game to fit their students' language level. They should choose the game that fits the purposes of that class or the content. Moreover, teachers should consider students' characteristics: whether they are old or young, serious-minded or light-hearted, and highly motivated to learn or not. They should also consider when the game should be used

According to Richard-Amato (1996), even though games are often associated with fun, we should not lose sight of their pedagogical values, particularly in second language teaching. Games are effective because they provide motivation, lower students' stress, and give them the opportunity for real communication.

The main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that "they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses" (Avedon, 1971). Naturally when playing games, students are trying to win or to beat other teams for themselves or on the behalf of their team. They are so competitive while playing because they want to have a turn to play, to score points and to win. In the class, students will definitely participate in the activities. Therefore, it is possible for a teacher to introduce students to new ideas, grammar, and knowledge and so on. As in the dictation game, students are so competitive that they want to finish first and win. It can be clearly seen that games can capture students' attention and participation. They can motivate students to want to learn more. Moreover, they can transform a boring class into a challenging one.

Another reason why games are often used in language classes is that they lower students' stress in the classroom. In conventional classrooms, there is a lot of stress put on students trying to master the target language. Schultz (1988) said that

*"...Stress is a major hindrance in language learning process. This process [Learning language in traditional way] is by its nature time consuming and stress provoking... ... raise the stress level to a point at which it interferes with student attention and*

*efficiency and undermines motivation. .... One method has been developed to make students forget that they are in class ....relax students by engaging them in stress-reducing task (games)."*

There is a high level of stress in the classroom because students have to face unfamiliar or unknown grammatical structures, words, texts and so forth. Therefore, students often feel uncomfortable and insecure in class, which inevitably affects their ability to learn. As a result, games can help lower their anxiety, make them feel comfortable, and want to learn more. It is believed that when students play games, they relax and have fun. Since students know that they are playing games and want to communicate efficiently they do not worry about making mistakes and do not try to correct themselves in every single sentence. When students are free from worry and stress, they can improve their fluency and natural speaking styles.

Next, students learn without realizing that they are learning (Schultz, 1988.) For instance, when playing a game called "What Would You Do If?" students will have to pick one hypothetical question from those that they have written in a box. They might get a question like "What would you do if a lion came into this classroom?" Next they have to pick one answer that they have written before. The answer they get may be "I would be a fly." Usually the question and the answer they get do not match each other, so students have to use their own imaginations to explain their bizarre answer, and everyone has fun listening to it. The explanation might be "If a lion came into this classroom, I would be a fly because I am a good person, so an angel would come and rescue me by turning me into a fly." While trying to explain, students do not worry too much about grammar mistakes because they want to communicate and to explain why it can happen. Apart from having fun, students do not worry about errors and punishment; moreover, they will learn a grammatical rule and have a chance to use it. Thus, they learn unconsciously-learn without realizing they are learning. Students stop thinking about language and begin using it in a spontaneous and natural manner within the classroom (Schutz, 1988.)

Another advantage is increasing students' proficiency. Playing games in the classroom can enormously increase students' ability in using language because students have a chance to use language with a purpose in the situations provided. Hadfield (1990) confirms that "games provide as much concentrated practice as a traditional drill and more importantly, they provide an opportunity for real communication, albeit within artificially defined limits, and thus constitute a bridge between classroom and the real word." Like in a traditional classroom, students have an opportunity to drill and practice using grammatical rules and other functions.

On the other hand, Lee mentioned that there is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games.\*

There are many advantages of using games in the classroom:

- 1- Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
- 2- They are motivating and challenging.

- 3- Learning a language requires a great deal of effort, games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
- 4- Games provide language practice in the various skill-speaking, writing, listening and reading.
- 5- They encourage students to interact and communicate.
- 6- They create a meaningful context for language use.

In a research paper done by Mei and Yu-jing they said that Games are fun and children like them. Through games children experiment, discover, and interact with their environment. Through playing games, students can learn English the way children learn their mother tongue without being aware they are studying; thus without stress, they can learn a lot even shy students can participate positively. They point how to choose a game.

- A game must be more than just a fun.
- A game should involve "friendly" competition.
- A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.
- A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.
- A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material.

Students may wish to play games purely for fun. Teachers, however, need more convincing reasons.

Teachers need to consider which games to use, when to use them, how to link them up with the syllabus, text book or programmed, and how, more specifically, different games will benefit students in different ways. The key to a successful language game is that the rules are clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun. A dissertation was written on the role of word games in second language acquisition second language pedagogy, motivation and ludic tasks, the study attempted to determine the role of word games and student motivation in the second-language classroom environment; and to compare games with more traditional practices as effective learning tools. The games were selected for their adherence to principles of task-based instruction and communicative approaches to pedagogy. Results of the

quantitative analysis showed that one game yielded results that lent support to the hypotheses that drive this study. Namely, learners who play certain types of word games will be more motivated to learn than learners who use more traditional activities; that games enhance the classroom environment, create a sense of community and enhance the learner / teacher relationship. Results for the remaining three games did not support the hypotheses. Those games yielded negative results concerning word games in pedagogy. The learners described those games as boring and pointless, learners stated that word games should not be an integral part of the curriculum, and they sensed that their peers did not enjoy the games. However, results showed that having fun and creative activities, are highly valued. The qualitative analysis was more favorable for all four games. Together, the data (quantitative and qualitative) suggest that word games may be motivating and effective, provided they are sound academically fun, competitive, closely linked to material being studied and timely. Otherwise, learners do not embrace the use of games enthusiastically, (Ojeda, 2004)

The use of innovative educational games in the classroom can increase enthusiasm and reinforce previously presented didactic information. It is also a positive, interactive alternative method of teaching and information sharing. In addition, team learning and active peer-to-peer instruction are strongly reinforced by educational games. (Bailey, 1999)

Games increase students' involvement, motivation, and interest in the material and allow the instructor to be creative and original when presenting topics. (Odenweller, 1998). Games also challenge students to apply the information, thus allowing them to evaluate their critical thinking skills. They create a challenging constructively competitive atmosphere that facilitates interaction among students in a friendly and fun environment. (Patil, 1993)



## **Aims of the Study**

This study aims to know the effect of using educational games on learning a foreign language. The study will answer the following questions:

1. Is it useful to use games in teaching English Language?
2. Do games create an interactive environment in the classroom?
3. Do games facilitate learning a foreign language?
4. Is there a relation between learning theories (Behaviorism learning theory, Cognitivism learning theory and Constructivism learning theory- and games? Do games belong to a specific learning theory?
5. Do games encourage students to solve unstructured problems, communicate, navigate, and evaluate and use the second language effectively?
6. Do games encourage students to learn independently as well as work collaboratively?
7. Does the use of educational games enhance creativity; improve design skills and the ability to present information using the second language?
8. What effect does educational games use have on students' motivation?
9. Do games influence students' achievement?

## **Research Hypotheses**

- There will be no significant difference in using games on learning a foreign language.  $H_0: U_1=U_2$
- There will be no significant difference in using games and age on learning a foreign language.  $H_0: U_1=U_2$
- There will be no significant difference in using games and gender on learning a foreign language.  $H_0: U_1=U_2$
- There will be no significant difference in using games and educational grade on learning a foreign language.  $H_0: U_1=U_2$

## **Significance of the Study**

One of the problems in teaching strategies is that they are too abstract at all levels, especially in basic stage. For example, children in grade 3 learn what an island is in the following way: "An island is a piece of land surrounded by water on all sides." This is a formal definition, and as such is devoid of life, leaving almost no space for imagination, compare it with a story told by the teacher, of someone whose boat sank and swam to a beach, then tried to go home and wherever he went there were more beaches. This story should be enriched by all sorts of details on what the person found, fruits, animals, and so on. It could be accompanied by a beautiful drawing made by the teacher at the blackboard using colored chalk. The drawing should leave space for imagination, and not contain all possible details as though it were a photograph. In this way the children can create their own inner images, and innerly participate in the drama felt by the hero of the story. They could create a living island in their minds. After such a story the children would be asked to draw with crayons whatever they liked about the story (and here an element of freedom is introduced into the classroom), thus requiring some exterior action, and not just intellectual absorption.

The excessive abstraction in learning activities causes children to hate school and the second language too. They simply can not identify with what they are learning, because it usually has nothing to do with reality and their whole beings- it mostly directed at their intellects.

The simple fact that children have to sit for hours listening to what the teacher says, without doing anything else than thinking, eventually interrupting this process by writing in their notebooks. Observe children leaving a typical school: often one observes something like an explosion, running around, beating each other, etc. This is an expression of their having absorbed the whole time and not having been able to actively contribute anything. Usually classes are not balanced, in a rhythm of inspiration and expiration.

The study attempts to provide practical information for the field of teaching a second language. Both students and teachers will get benefit and teachers may achieve all the educational outcomes through applying the use of games in their

lessons in a way that facilitate the use of the second language for the young learners.

### ***Research Design and Methodology***

- a- **Design of the study**: An experimental research and using three groups out of six randomly. The researcher's approach in the study relies extensively on the use of games with very little formal instruction. It emphasized on the development of appropriate language to facilitate an understanding of a second language through games.
- b- **Subject of the study**: Three groups from different basic grades ( 4-7-10) classes. Group (A) is the experimental group while (B) is the controlled group.
- c- **Materials**: 1- Pre –test and  
2- Post-test  
3- Games
- d- **Statistical Treatment**: To determine the relationship between learning a foreign language and educational games among the participants, a one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is performed based on achievement levels.  
- Correlational Analyses: For the relation between educational games and learning a foreign language a Pearson's Correlational analysis is used.

### **Limitations of the study:**

- \*The time period is five months (20 lessons per month each lesson is 45 minutes.)
- \*The tools were some language games (The topic road-revision cards-miming-fishing game-triple pelmanisms)

### **Variables:**

Independent variable: using the educational games.

Dependent variable: achievement of the students.

### **Results and conclusions:**

- \*The results of the post test for the experimental group are so better than the controlled one which show that games have a good effect on improving the achievement for the primary stage and to create an interactive environment.

\*The use of games in teaching English has increased the student's attention and motivation and it is very useful to use games.

\* Games create a rich environment full with interaction and stimulations for the students

***Recommendations:***

It is recommended to use games since they are very effective especially for the primary stages in teaching a second language and games are helpful for the teacher as a procedure for language acquisition.

***Definition of key terms:***

- 1) Achievement: the quality and quantity of a student's work.
- 2) Educational games: the games which are used in teaching English through the educational process.
- 3) Language acquisition: is the process by which the language capability develops in a human.
- 4) Students: the students of third grade girls in Salma al-Ansaria School.
- 5) Revision cards: A game that instead of writing topics on the board, leave it blank. Copy out a range of revision questions (grammar, vocabulary.....)And cut them up into separate cards. When a learner lands on a square they take a card, if they can answer they stay on the square.
- 6) Topic road: A game that we write one topic in each square(friends) learners play in groups ,throwing the dice and moving their counter from square to square when they land on a square they should talk fluently for 30 seconds on that topic. If they succeed they keep their piece on the square, if not they must go back where they were before.
- 7) Fishing game: Write some sentences on long narrow slips of paper, each with a missing vocabulary item, i.e.I have lost my ..... Again. Curve all the slips round so that they each make an O shape, sticking one end to the other sticky tape make a fishing rod using a stick.
- 8) Triple Pelmanisms: A game that the pairs version of this is quite well-known. Students have a number of cards in front of them up side down and they must

take turns turning over two. If they get a word that matches the picture they keep the cards.

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