



PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TO BOARD-GAMES AND THEIR BOARD-GAME PLAYING PRACTICE¹

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Abstract: The usage of games in the process of teaching and learning is always advantageous, because children prefer to learn playfully. Board-games are particularly enjoyable for children. They do not learn consciously, but they enjoy playing together with their parents and siblings, because board-games bring together both family and friends. Playing board-games is not only a joyful activity, it also develops different skills of the player, as communication skills, strategy creating and problem solving competency, cooperation, etc. Nowadays there are many board-games on sale, active board-game playing communities organize events, and a culture of playing board-games is developing. Thus integrating board-games in educational activities seems to be a natural process to follow. But this integration has many obstacles, as time and curriculum constrains, the lack of methodological knowledge of the teachers, inadequate choose of educational board-games for some subjects, etc. The aim of this research is to study primary school teachers' attitude to playing board-games and their board-game playing practice. The results show that majority of the participating elementary school teachers love playing board-games, almost half of them also play board games in their private life. Most of them bring these games to the classroom as well. Teachers love these games, because they are fun, teach logical thinking, make students creative, help them to relax, are team builders, motivate students to learn, get used to speed, develop attention, teach strategies, and are childhood favorites.

Key words: board-game, primary school, in-service teachers

1. Introduction

Teachers who realize that nowadays we need to examine the role of the teacher in the light of postmodern pedagogy, are trying to grant the challenges of making the teaching-learning process effective. Today, there would be very little to cling to traditional identities, as the teacher is no longer the well-head of knowledge. In the world of modern technology, this role can no longer be maintained. The teacher today is a professional pedagogue who is responsible for the effectiveness of learning processes (Birta–Székely, 2010). Today, clever students do not have to be taught everything, teachers only have to provide the resources and tools that arouse their interest. This requires quite a lot of work and creativity from the teacher (Rogers–Feiberg, quoted by Klein 2013).

Game and playfulness are positive elements in education that make learning and teaching attractive to both the student and the teacher. This positive effect is especially felt through board-games, not only in early childhood, but also later (Jesztl–Lencse, 2018). Some teachers like to play board-games and also use board-games at school in certain moments of the lesson.

This research aim to study primary school teachers' attitude to board-games and their board-game playing habits.

2. Theoretical background

Nowadays, it is a growing challenge to motivate children to learn. In our rapidly changing world, the approximately fifteen thousand hours that students spend in schools must be shaped by teachers so that

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future adults could succeed in life and realize themselves (Rogers, quoted by Klein 2013). We need to bring something into the teaching-learning process that can capture children's attention in the world of technology and arouse their interest in learning.

For children, game has always been the most natural medium where they felt home. Learning by playing is the most attractive form of learning for children. The teacher must pay attention not only to the communication of thoughts, but also to the colors, sounds and shapeable forms that give children more joy and more experiences (Winkler, 2003). Perhaps civilization has also brought the fact that children no longer play enough (Neill, 2005). Games help children to communicate, to get to know their own environment and culture (Stark, 2010). But if a child loses his ability to play, he dies in spirit and means danger to the other children he comes in contact with (Neill, 2005).

There is need for teachers who like to play, are flexible and participate as partners in the educational process. Teachers who manifest integrative behavior treat students as partners and influence them indirectly. (Balog, 2006) Board-game pedagogy can be a useful tool for the indirect influence of the children, which can be bought, made and it is possible to choose out of games that provide a greater game-experience, according to their pedagogical goals (Jesztl-Lencse, 2018). In addition, playing board-games involves speaking and acting in the same time, and the simultaneous nature of these two activities while playing board-game provides a possibility to remember the learned content, because children remember „90% of what they say and do” (Dale E., referred by Huang & Levinson, 2012).

The teacher should avoid direct control from the background, his presence as a partner or player is more recommended. From the player's position, he has the opportunity to shape the situations with his behavior and decisions. As a professional, he should provide games in a way that lets the children to choose games for themselves according to their interests and level of knowledge (Jesztl-Lencse, 2016). The teacher can influence the process indirectly, for example, by putting available games that correspond to the goals (Lencse, 2013).

Board-game pedagogy is a pedagogical method that supports the natural development of a person's playfulness and thus of the personality in general by teaching board games, which uses the most appropriate board games to promote the development of a personality, community and situation (Aczél, 2015).

Board-games develop key competencies. „A growing body of research proves that properly designed team-based board games not only inspire learning, they encourage communication, collaboration and risk taking.” (Treher, 2011, 4.) There are board-games that are designed to entertain and still can be included in class and in the teaching process of different subjects, but some board-games are designed particularly for teaching goals. It plays a major role in the development of mother tongue communication, text comprehension, reading, word comprehension, use of synonyms, etc. Games recommended for this purpose are Citadella, Tabu, and Mizéria. For teaching new words to the students in a foreign language, the game Guess Who is the suitable game (Fejes, Lencse & Szűcs, 2016) or the game Relax which is designed by the author to teach Romanian words to the minority children who live in Romania (Juhász, 2020). Board-games also develop mathematical competencies, as in many games it is essential to practice basic operations. Such games are Carcassone, No Grace or For Sale (Fejes, Lencse & Szűcs, 2016). Zoo, Amusement park and Magic castle are games which proved to be useful in developing mental calculation skills (Zsoldos-Marchis, 2019). Board-games can also be incorporated very well into the development of science competencies, for example with the game called Fauna. Board games develop social competencies, entrepreneurial competencies, but also stimulate artistic awareness and effective, independent learning (Fejes, Lencse & Szűcs, 2016).

3. Methodology

The research was conducted among primary school teachers teaching in Hungarian classes from Romania, between November and December 2019.

3. 1. The purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to study primary school teachers' attitude to board-games and their board-game playing habits.

3.2. Research questions

The aim of this research was to find answers for the following questions:

1. Do primary school teachers play board-games?
2. What is/are primary school teachers' favourite board-game/s?
3. Have primary school teachers used board-games in the classroom?
4. What board-games do primary school teachers use when teaching?
5. Why do they like to play the board-games they mentioned?

3.3. Research tool

The research tool was a questionnaire with more sections regarding board-games, developed by the author. For the present study, the part of the questionnaire that relates to teachers' attitude to board-games, their board-game playing habits was selected. So, in addition to the 7 demographic questions, 14 questions were selected. From these 14 items 11 are closed questions (10 formulated as statements to be evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale and one multiple-choice question) and 3 open-ended questions.

3.4. Participants

The participants were 75 in-service primary school teachers who teach in Hungarian classes from Romania from 10 different counties. 57% of the teachers work in rural schools and 43% in urban schools. Most of the respondents (85%) teach in traditional schools on different grade level classes from preparatory class to 4th grade (in Romania the primary school is 5 years: preparatory class, then from 1st grade to 4th grade). 21% of the respondents teach in mixed classes, these classes are usually in rural area schools where there are not enough pupils to form separate classes. Almost half of the respondents (44%) have a vast teaching experience, more than 20 years, and one fifth (20%) of the respondents between 16 and 20 years of experience (Figure 1). They are also well-qualified teachers, as 84% of the participants has a university level diploma and more than half (55%) of the respondents have obtained the 1st grade certificate (see Figure 2).

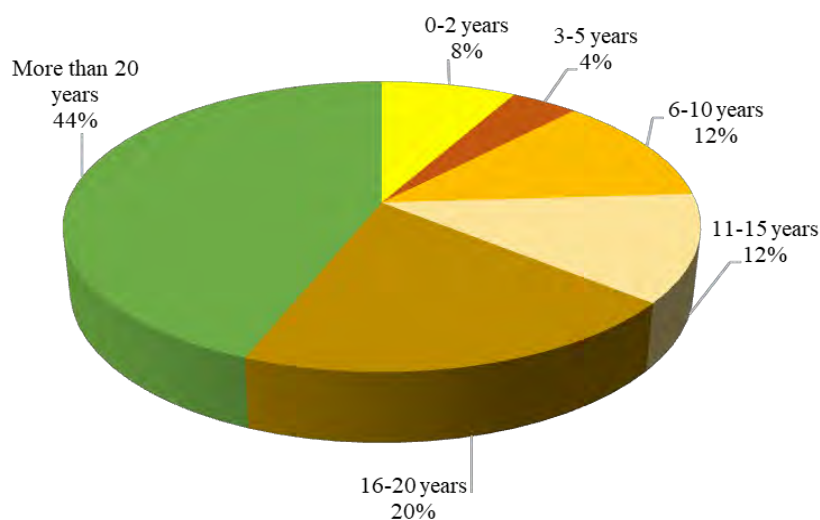


Figure 1. Respondents' teaching experience

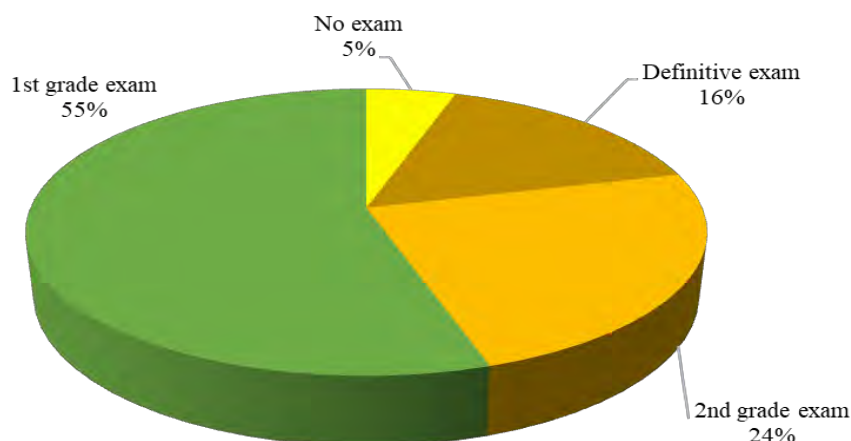


Figure 2. Exams taken by the respondents

4. Results

To find out participants' attitude to board-games and their board-game playing practice, 10 affirmations measured on a 5-level Likert scale (from 1 - not true at all for me to 5 - completely true for me) were formulated. The results are shown in Table 1. In this table in case of each affirmation the proportion of the participants who disagree with the statement (adding the percentages of those who ticked 1 and 2) and the proportion of the participants who agree with the statement (adding the percentages of those who ticked 4 and 5) is given. We can notice that the majority of teachers like to play board games (92% of the participants), they consider them being fun (90.6%), so they do not get bored of these games (93.3%). More than half of the teachers have board-games at home (64.4% of the participants) and they also have the right company for the game (60%). Even if the majority of the respondents likes board-game playing, the one fourth (28%) of them don't have time for this leisure activity and one fifth of them (18.6%) don't often play board-games. As regarding the type of board-games they like to play, more than half of the participants (53.3%) prefer board games in which complex strategies need to be devised. This is somehow in contradiction with the result that only one fourth (24%) of the participants don't like board-games that depend mostly on luck. Table 1 also contains mean and standard deviation in case of each statement. We could observe that the highest mean obtained is for the affirmation "I like to play board-games.", followed by the affirmation "I enjoy playing board-games."

Table 1. Teachers's board-game playing practice

Statements	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Mean	Standard deviation
I like to play board-games.	1.3	92	4.55	0.70
I get bored of board-games.	93.3	2.6	1.27	0.74
I do not have time to play board-games.	36	28	2.78	1.03
I have many interesting board-games.	9.3	64	3.86	1.06
I prefer board-games in which complex strategies need to be devised.	14.6	53.3	3.51	0.94
I do not have the right company for playing board-games.	60	12	2.13	1.21
I often play board-games.	18.6	41.3	3.36	0.99
I enjoy playing board-games.	1.3	90.6	4.46	0.72
It annoys me when I lose in board-games.	84	2.6	1.71	0.81
I don't like board games that depend mostly on luck.	38.6	24	2.76	1.15

Participants answered an open-ended question about what their favorite board-game is. The results were processed by a qualitative method. The frequency of occurrence in case of each mentioned game was counted.

The most popular board-games among teachers are: Activity (mentioned by 6 participants), Rummy (mentioned by 5 participants), Catan (mentioned by 4 participants), Brain Box (mentioned by 4 participants), Don't feel aggrieved, brother! (mentioned by 4 participants), Pseudonyms (mentioned by 3 participants), Monopoly (mentioned by 3 participants), Manage wisely! (mentioned by 3 participants), Dobble (mentioned by 2 participants), Dixit (mentioned by 2 participants), Tabu (mentioned by 2 participants), Cards (mentioned by 2 participants).

Other questions were if the teachers had already used board games in the teaching process and if they would bring the same games to class that they play as private persons. It turned out that 92% of teachers have already used board-games in the classroom. In both cases Activity occupies the first place. This game is the teachers' favorite and this is the game they use most often in the classroom too (14 participants). The second favorite is Brain Box (mentioned by 6 participants). The third game is Dixit (mentioned by 4 participants), the fourth is Domino (mentioned by 3 participants), Manage wisely! (mentioned by 3 participants), Tic Tac Bumm (mentioned by 3 participants), Don't feel aggrieved, brother! and Mill game (mentioned by 3 participants). The fifth is Dobble (mentioned by 2 participants), Rummy (mentioned by 2 participants), Scrabble (mentioned by 2 participants), Halli Galli (mentioned by 2 participants), Who am I? (mentioned by 2 participants), Uno (mentioned by 2 participants). In addition to these games, 8% of participants use home-made games.

Also, the reasons why participants like the board-games they mentioned were studied. Based on elementary school teachers' responses, board-games are fun (32%), teach logical thinking (21.3%), build teams (21.3%), help learning (16%), develop students' creativity (14.6%), develop attention (9.3%), are interesting (6.6%), get used to speed (6.6%), help to relax (5.3%), teach strategies (2.6%), are childhood favorites (2.6%). These positive aspects of the board-games are presented more from a player point of view in this study.

According to the results of an earlier study, primary school teachers consider the following advantages of using board-games in the process of teaching: it supports collaborative learning, develops problem solving skills, evokes deep learning based on curiosity, develops intrinsic motivation, promotes better comprehension skills, evokes active participation, develops important competencies such as decision making competency, develops responsibility, provides instant feedback among the players, provides the possibility to raise the status of marginalized children, provides connections between social life and the course material and helps the integration of STEM disciplines (Zsoldos–Marchis & Juhász, 2020).

5. Conclusions

The majority of the participating elementary school teachers love board-games, of which 41.3% also play board games in their private life. Most of them bring these games to the classroom as well. Their favorite game is Activity as private persons, and they most often bring this game to the classroom as well. This game is followed by Brain Box, Dixit, and many other games that teachers use in the teaching-learning process. Interestingly, 8% of the participants use home-made games when teaching. Teachers love these games, because they are fun, teach logical thinking, make students creative, help them to relax, are team builders, motivate students to learn, get used to speed, develop attention, teach strategies, and are childhood favorites.

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