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LANGUAGE GAMES FOR PROMOTING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ELT

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ABSTRACT

Language Games for Promoting Communication Skills in ELT Abstract: 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 merriment and laughter, then it is not actually learning. It is a wrong conception. 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. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills.

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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. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication.' The common scenario of English language teaching is to make students learning the structure of language and than to practice it through exercises, but in doing so the natural way of learning the language disappears. The learner of English language is not at all exposed to the usage of language and therefore cannot be a fluent speaker of English which further harms his/her ability to communication in that language. Thus it becomes very necessary for learners to acquire English in such a manner that promote their communication skills. The play-way manner of language learning is one of the finest features of communicative approach which has been implemented in textbooks of English in schools. This paper focuses upon the use of language games in English Language Teaching for enhancing the communication skills of learners which is the sole aim of any language learning. Key Words: Language games, ELT, Communication skills, Language learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The major focus of ELT practitioners now-a -days is shifted from developing individual linguistic skills to the use of language to achieve the speaker's objectives. This new area of focus, known as communicative competence, leads language teachers to seek task-oriented activities that engage their students in creative language use. Games, which are task-based and have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, serve as excellent communicative activities (Saricoban & Metin 2000). On the surface, the aim of all language games is for students to "use the language"; however, during game play learners also use the

target language to persuade and negotiate their way to desired results. This process involves the productive and receptive skills simultaneously.

URGE FOR ENHANCING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ELT

Communication is the exchange of information or ideas between two or more people. It is the act of expressing thoughts in a manner that others understand. The development of language learning or teaching from form-based to a meaning-based approach, the move towards an eclectic approach from a rigid method, the shift from teacher-fronted to learner-centered classes, are all included under the broad term Communicative Approach. Listening and speaking are two important aspects of communication. Listening is the action of the meanings of the words and sentences by the brain. A closed mind is the biggest hindrance to effective listening. But it is also only one means to an end, and we judge a course communicative or otherwise not only in terms of how it is organized, but also in terms of its methodology.

Communicative Competence: Any learner's communicative competence refers to his/her ability not only to produce grammatically correct sentences, but also to know when and where to use these sentences. It emphasizes on appropriateness of language. Many syllabuses have been developed under the label 'communicative approach', and each syllabus claims that it can achieve the aim of the approach, namely, that of communicative competence. All these syllabuses share certain common features:

- They are all based on a semantically organized syllabus, such as the notional syllabus.
- They teach the language needed in different situations, to express and understand

different functions.

- They emphasize appropriacy of language use.
- They also teach the language required to perform different tasks (for example, solving puzzles and getting information)

Techniques used in the Communicative Approach:

In communicative language teaching, information gap tasks are used. An information gap occurs in a situation where one person knows something which other people do not. Information gap tasks are introduced in the classroom using the following techniques:

Language games: According to Morrow (1981) language games are communicative when they are characterized by three features: information gap, choice and feedback.

Mind Engaging Tasks: Communicative activities are based on the implicit recognition that a learner learns best when his/her mind is on tasks to be done in the language rather than on language itself.

Role Play: Since the ability to manipulate language in a social context is an important aspect of communicative competence, most communicative materials include role play as part of the activities.

Retrieving Text Order: The technique involves the use of scrambled sentences and scrambled picture techniques. By doing these activities, learners become aware of discourse features which are distinct from grammatical features.

Group Work/Pair Work: Group work and pair work form an important part of any

communicative activity, for peer interaction is an effective means of acquiring some language features which are not available in a formal teacher-fronted class.

Language games: Salient feature for Oral Fluency

It has been argued by many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers that language games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. W. R. Lee holds that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms (1979:2). He also says that games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching program. A similar opinion is expressed by Richard-Amato, who believes games to be fun but warns against overlooking their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching. There are many advantages of using games. "Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely" (Richard-Amato 1988:147). They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (Hansen 1994:118). They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson. Furthermore, to quote Richard-Amato, they, "add diversion to the regular classroom activities," break the ice, "[but also] they are used to introduce new ideas" (1988:147). In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better (Wierus and Wierus 1994:218). S. M. Silvers says many teachers are enthusiastic about using games as "a teaching device," yet they often perceive games as mere time-fillers, "a break from the monotony of drilling" or frivolous activities. He also claims that many teachers often overlook the fact that in a relaxed atmosphere, real learning takes place, and students use the language they have been exposed to and have practised earlier (1982:29). Games offer students a fun-filled and relaxing learning atmosphere. After learning and practicing new vocabulary, students have the opportunity to use language in a non-stressful way (Uberman 1998). While playing games,

the learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. Rather than pay attention to the correctness of linguistic forms, most participants will do all they can to win.. In a game-oriented context, anxiety is reduced and speech fluency is generated – thus communicative competence is achieved.

The benefits of using games in language-learning can be as follows;

Games....

- ❖ Create learner centered classroom.
- ❖ Promote communicative competence.
- ❖ Create a meaningful context for language use.
- ❖ Increase learning motivation.
- ❖ Reduce learning anxiety.
- ❖ Integrate various linguistic skills.
- ❖ Encourage creative and spontaneous use of language.
- ❖ Construct a cooperative learning environment.
- ❖ Fosters participatory attitudes of the students.

Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information. 'The need for meaningfulness in language learning has been accepted for some years. A useful interpretation of 'meaningfulness' is that the learners respond to the content in a definite way. If they are amused, angered, intrigued or surprised the content is clearly meaningful to them. Thus the meaning of the language they listen to,

read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and, therefore, better remembered. If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to the Teacher's reportier.

WHEN TO USE GAMES

Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. Yet, as Lee observes, a game "should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do" (1979:3). Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. Rixon suggests that games be used at all 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 authors referred to in this article 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.

How to Choose Games (Tyson, 2000)

- ❖ A game must be more than just 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.

Conducting games in teaching differs from the traditional teaching methods such as repetition, memorization and imitation which demotivate students' incentive to learn. Teaching English through game-like activities can cheer up the class and make language learning more pleasurable and easier to learn. Most of all, games motivate students to become effective communicators in the target language, and help them use the language in a more spontaneous and natural manner [31]. Moreover, games are particularly suitable for most children at primary level who have a shorter attention span since the nature of games which provides joy, excitement and amusement can hold attention of children and aid recall. Activities like these can not merely inspire and sustain students' interest in learning English, but facilitate them to familiarize and reproduce features of language as well.

CONCLUSION

The teaching and learning English by means of language games is effective and efficient in improving students' communication skills. While in the traditional method of teaching English, students sit still listening to teachers talking about English language and try their best to remember English words and grammatical rules by rote memory, in the communicative language teaching approach they are actively involved in playing games which in turn can arouse and maintain their interest in learning, promote their motivation of study, and at the same time get lots of opportunities to have their basic skills of listening and speaking practiced. Admittedly, there are many difficulties in using games in most English classes, but it is possible to use them as long as both teachers and students appreciate their value and function. When using games, such factors as the time, choice, preparation and management should be put into consideration, which is the guarantee of successful use of

language games in class. In a word, using games in English teaching very well represents the theme of the communicative language teaching approach – “Communicating to learn” and “learning to communicate”.

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