

## DEVELOPING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE LEARNING SKILLS AND INCREASING THEIR MOTIVATION THROUGH GAMIFICATION

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***Annotation:** This article provides information on the development of language learning skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening comprehension skills) of schoolchildren through gamification and various educational and pedagogical games and increasing students' motivation through these games*

***Key words:** language learning skills, speaking, writing, reading, listening comprehension skills, gamification, educational games, pedagogical games, motivation.*

Games are fun activities that promote interaction, thinking, learning, and problem solving strategies. Often, games have an aspect that permits the players to produce information in a short time period. Some games require the players to engage in a physical activity and/or complete a mental challenge. “Games are effective tools for learning because they offer students a hypothetical environment in which they can explore alternative decisions without the risk of failure. Thought and action are combined into purposeful behavior to accomplish a goal. Playing games teaches us how to strategize, to consider alternatives, and to think flexibly”. That quote summarizes my beliefs about using games to teach, practice and reinforce a foreign language. Games provide a constructivist classroom environment where students and their learning are central. “Learning through performance requires active discovery, analysis, interpretation, problem-solving, memory, and physical activity and extensive cognitive processing”. Students draw their own meaning from these

experiences while learning from their mistakes and also from each other. The students also build upon their previous knowledge and use their new knowledge in a situation separate from the activity in which they learned it. Furthermore, the teacher is now able to make observations on each student and see what areas the class or individuals are struggling with or excelling at as well as the social dynamics of the group. Montessori classrooms are world renowned for implementing constructivism successfully. Their teachers are trained in theories which promote learning through experience. They remind us that when small children learn, trial and error is a part of everyday life. “The learning process should be interesting, easy and it should be fun to learn. It also should fit with an everyday task and the working environment in order to achieve optimum results”. Games allow for creativity, independence and higher order thinking. Usually, questions posed by the classroom teacher are fact based and have only one answer, not allowing for creativity, personal expression, or testing hypotheses. The answer is either right or wrong, but games can allow for multiple answers. They improve participation, self-esteem, and vocabulary usage and allow the learners to see that there are many ways to solve the same problem. Additionally, it is more like real life. For instance, most conversations start with open ended questions: “How are you?”, “What did you do yesterday?”, “How can I help you?”, and “What would you like for dinner?” As foreign language learners, it is important that they are provided with scenarios that are as realistic as possible.

Teaching English to school children is not an easy job; it requires a lot of work and preparation. Language learning is hard work. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time.”

As games are so much approved by researchers, let us so more deeply to the study of games as motivating means in learning. First of all, we should define the term “game”. Definition of Terms According to The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, games are defined as “an organized activity that has the following properties: a particular task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players, and communication between players by spoken or

written language”. Language games are not aimed to kill time or break the ice between teachers and students. Hadfield said games are “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun”.

The benefits of using games in language-learning can be summed up in nine points.

Games:

- ✓ are learner centered.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ foster participatory attitudes of the students.

**How to use games in language teaching.** It could seem to use the games in almost every lesson and in all classes. It is wrong presumption, though. Not all classes enjoy games and not all lessons are appropriate for incorporating of the games. There is no rule for using the game thus. Teacher can use the game for example as a warm up activity or revision of the previous lesson at the beginning of the lesson or as a summary of the skills at the end. However, games can be used during the whole lesson as well. Thus, this variety corresponds with the ability of the teacher to use the game in the right moment. Paul speaks about the alternative to divide a lesson into “studying” and “fun” sections. But the problem can appear here because children will always tend to compare those two sections. In comparison integrating games smoothly to teaching/learning process allow us using games without distinguishing between “fun” and “study”.

It can also happen that class, that normally enjoys games in lessons, can refuse the game from time to time. That is why teacher must be very attentive to students’

reactions and the atmosphere of each lesson. The very important point here is that “no one should be forced to play games.” The same author advises to “let him be an observer....”

Carrier emphasizes another important factor: “The teacher must prepare the game thoroughly. Games may be good fun but they need to be carefully **prepared and well organized**. Before a game is used with a class the teacher must be sure that the necessary facilities (for example the overhead projector) are available. .... When materials are used which have been prepared on previous occasion (including commercial cards or board games), the teacher must make sure the contents are complete.”

Before using games in the classroom teachers should consider several aspects.

*Preparation.* Being well-prepared for the lesson is a half of success. Teachers should think of the activity they want to use. Is it good for their pupils? I asked the following questions before

Does it cover the grammar level? Does it need any special materials, space?

Does the activity need group work, pair or individual work? If it is group work, how large will the groups be?

Does it need preparation in the classroom or any copies of the worksheets?

*Organization.* Before the activity, I announced what pupils were expected to do. I explained all rules carefully and ask pupils if they understood. Then they were supposed to change seating or make groups if it was necessary. Whilst pupils were playing the game, I watched and helped if it is needed. We finished the game at a fixed time.

*Expectation.* Being prepared for unexpected is really important. At any time something could go wrong. The activity could be difficult for children or they do not understand the rules, they have problems within the game, problems whilst making groups, problems in the group etc.

In the experience during my practice at school, I came to such a conclusion that grammar lessons become really motivating when games are applied. It is granted that

without games or fun activities pupils get bored, especially, if they are at their beginning or elementary level.

In conclusion, games can be used by learners of all ages because everybody likes them. They have many advantages, especially enhancing cooperation and motivation. Adding to that, they provide successful, joyful and enthusiastic learning.

All in all, it has been stated that language can be taught and revised through games. That means that games can be a vital part of teacher's everyday repertoire as language games give fun and relaxed atmosphere accompanying the activities facilitated students' learning. But this is not the only possible explanation of such an outcome. The use of games during the lessons motivates students to work more on the language knowledge on their own.

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