



## English Language Learning with the Help of Language Games

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### Introduction

Use of the English language is so widespread that it has no nationality; it belongs to the people who use it. In India English is used extensively as a link language among people speaking different regional languages. English has gained a place of pride in the curricula at various levels of formal education.

Education aims at promoting the all-round development of an individual's personality. In any program of education besides the curricula subjects, a variety of other activities are conducted. Teachers can strive for the all-round development of their students by organizing a wide variety of activities in school besides providing suitable learning experiences through the academic subjects.

It should be borne in mind that language learning is a challenging task requiring constant effort especially for young learners. Games encourage learners to direct their energy towards language learning by providing them with meaningful contexts. Therefore, it is important that teachers should not see games as time fillers or tools designed for fun only, but integrate them into their foreign language teaching programs. It is possible to come up with many descriptions proposed by various researchers about the nature of games.

Another advantage associated with games is that students' anxiety towards language learning decreases as games are employed. In language classes, learners feel stressful because they think that they have to master the target language that is unknown to them. Besides, learners become too anxious about being criticized and punished by their teachers when they make a mistake. Games are advantageous at this point because they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self confidence because learners are not afraid of punishment or

criticism while practicing the target language freely. Games are student-focused activities requiring active involvement of learners.

By using games, teachers can create contexts which enable unconscious learning because learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. Therefore, when they completely focus on a game as an activity, students acquire language in the same way that they acquire their mother tongue, that is, without being aware of it. Games bring real-life situations to the confinement of the classroom which provides learners with an opportunity to use the language. Celce-Murcia argues that "in games, language use takes precedence over language practice, and in this sense games help to bring the real world to the classroom, no matter how contrived they may be." To state this differently, by putting learners in real life situations, games make a connection with the real usage of language. In addition to these, Mc Callum explains that there are many advantages of games such as the fact that –

1. Games focus students' attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items.
2. Games can function as reinforcement, review and enrichment.
3. Games involve equal participation from both slow and fast learners.
4. Games can be adjusted to suit the individual age and language levels of the students.
5. Games contribute to an atmosphere of healthy competition, providing an outlet for the creative use of natural language in a non-stressful situation.
6. Games can be used in any language teaching situations and with all skill areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing).
7. Games provide immediate feedback for the teacher.
8. The use of games as a teaching strategy has been widely adopted in different subject areas of the curriculum, such as the Social Sciences (Steele, 1995), Mathematics (Downton, 2004; Markey, 1997), Physics (Chandler, 1996), Biology (Nemerow, 1996), and Medicine and Nursing (Anderson, 1998; Gary, Marrone and Boyes, 1998; Ogershok and Cottrell, 2004). There has also been a tendency toward a greater use of games in the language classroom. Many innovative language teaching methods, such as the Natural Approach (Terrell, 1982), and Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1979) make use of language games.

The basic characteristics of game in general are:

- A game is fun and interesting.
- A game is rule governed.
- A game is goal defined.

- A game is engaging.
- A game is competitive.
- A game has a closure.

The perception of what constitutes a 'language game' is that it shares some common aspect with games in general, but also has specific traits.

'Language games' is a general term used to cover a variety of language activities. Language games are used for practicing specific language items such as grammar, sentence structures, vocabulary, and spelling; and for developing basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW).

The benefits of language games can be summed up in following points:

- Games are fun and amusing activities. The acquisition of input is therefore more likely.
- Games are motivating. They provide students an incentive to keep up with the hard work and strain of learning a foreign language by creating a competitive environment to use the target language. The competitive component of games also increases students' attention.
- Games are engaging and make students forget that they are actually learning.
- Games make students focus on the use of language, rather than on the language forms, so that they unconsciously apply grammar and vocabulary.
- Games are an opportunity for intensive practice.
- Games bring the foreign language to life by creating a meaningful, real-life context for using the foreign language.
- Games reduce anxiety and stress in the classroom, which helps learners remember things faster and better.
- Games allow students to learn using all their senses.
- Games allow language practice in various skills at the same time (speaking, writing, listening and reading -- LSRW).
- Games are a positive diversion from the regular language class routine.
- Games are an evaluative tool for the teacher and the student.
- Games allow the proceduralization of declarative knowledge. Games create a learner-centered environment because they are usually played in groups or pairs.
- Games positively influence the teacher-student relationship.
- Games engage all learners and involve them actively rather than passively.
- Games increase the amount of students' speaking time.

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- Games encourage shy students to participate.
- Games promote and increase cooperation among students in groups and create a feeling of team spirit.
- Games allow peer teaching and peer correction.
- Games allow interior differentiation and accommodate the different learning paces of students.

It is undeniable that games have a high pedagogical value in the foreign language classroom when they are appropriately chosen and used. Hadfield's claim is valid that "Games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of term".

The results of many research studies have shown positive outcomes from language games. The language games seem to hold a privileged position among different language learning tasks, because they are commonly perceived as having a range of considerable advantages and benefits in the foreign language learning process. They create a meaningful context, provide interactive group work, and help to internalize vocabulary. Furthermore, the competition that is generated by games enhances student motivation. They also reduce the stress in the classroom and improve the classroom atmosphere. Moreover, games can add elements of innovation and diversity to a sometimes monotonous and mostly very formal process of language instruction.

To sum up, we can say that language games have been proved to be a very useful tool to learn a foreign language easily in natural way.

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