

Impact of Games on attaining Oral Competence among ESL learners at Elementary level

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Abstract:

The study was carried out to know the effectiveness of using games in ESL class and further explored how games motivate and engage students to get oral proficiency skills. One of the most renowned games of English language office, U.S. State Department i.e. Activate was used to teach English language to 8th grade students for four weeks in experimental research design. 56 students were selected by using convenient sampling technique and divide them into two homogenous groups by using random sampling technique. Pre-test and post-test were conducted with four weeks intensive treatment of teaching through board games. The findings of the obtained data through tests and questionnaires revealed that there was significant improvement in the post-test grades of ESL students as compared to their performance in the pre-test. Games motivated students to learn quickly and also proved helpful in reducing anxiety and peer pressure. Data obtained from students and teachers further indicated that gamification can be used as effective teaching strategy in ESL classroom as it activated both parts of brain hemisphere and helped learners in constructing their knowledge and using it for interactional

purpose as evidence given by Vygotsky's ZPD activation and Dewey's Spiral path scaffolding technique.

Key words: games, oral competence, ESL learners, elementary level

INTRODUCTION

With the advancement in the fields of science and technology, there is increase in the use of English all over the globe. Non-native speakers of English language are more in number than native speakers. That's why learning English is desperate need of the today's world. The objective behind learning English language is to enhance English language proficiency of young learners so that they can better communicate with the world. They become able to perform different oral functions like advice, request, permissions and sharing their point of view. To make student competent enough so that they can better communicate with the world, it is utmost necessary to motivate learns and make them aware of the needs of recent world. Being foreign or second language it is difficult task to teach them English language. Furthermore, it also needs lot of efforts and devotion on the behalf of students. Motivation can work best in engaging learners in language learning activities. Their interest, devotion, curiosity encourage them to take active part in language learning activities and use language effectively.

Constructivism ideology is in favors of using and applying games in the language class because games provide learner centered or student centered environment. "Learning through performance requires active discovery, analysis, interpretation, problem-solving, memory, and physical activity and extensive cognitive processing" (Foreman 2003: 16). Students learn from their own mistakes and from each other during learning through games. Furthermore, teacher is able to observe every student and promotes learning through experience or through trial and error. "The learning process

should be interesting, easy and it should be fun to learn. It's also should fit with an everyday task and the working environment in order to achieve optimum results". (Pivec & Dziabenko 2010: 1).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching English is not an easy task. In Pakistan grammar translation method is being used for teaching English language. This method helps only in making them aware of grammatical rule rather than improving their speaking skills. Moreover, this method is teacher centered. Students were just the passive receiver of the information.

Teaching methodology plays an important role in second language learning as they are planned and systematic way of teaching. Traditional ways of teaching English language are not fulfilling the demands of modern world because they are very boring and time consuming. In this globally oriented teaching and learning atmosphere, students benefit from social media and internet tools. There had been many ESL games present on the internet which could be used as effective teaching strategies by the ESL teachers. ESL game boards are frequently used by teachers across the globe to teach English language effectively.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study tries to find the answer of the following questions:

1. What is the impact of Activate Game Boards on teaching oral proficiency skills to ESL learners?
2. To what extent game increase interest and motivation level of ESL learners in language classrooms?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This issue has been debated and extensively discussed in the theoretical and pedagogical literature that how to facilitate L2 acquisition (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1990, 1997, 2001; Hinkel & Fotos, 2002; Krashen & Terrell, 1998; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; 1991, 1993, 1994; Robinson, 2001; Rutherford, 1987). Linguists and Educators suggested various approaches for teaching English language as L2.

This study is helpful for both teacher and students. It is helpful for teachers to adopt those methodologies and games which can motivate students in language learning process without being passive and engaging them in learning process actively. It is beneficial for students to learn second language in less stressed environment. As students spend most of their time in playing game at computers that's why using digital games to teach English, is a positive step towards engaging the learners and practicing English enjoyably. It is also helpful for the students as games make their understanding clear. Games improve students' competence that's the ability to communicate with each other. Students draw their own conclusion based on their own experience while learning from their mistakes and coordination with others. Then they utilize this experience in new situation when they are away from these learning activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

FLEXIBILITY OF GAMES VERSUS STUDENTS LEARNING STYLES

Many researchers have been studies about learning styles and results reveals that people learn in variety of different ways. Different students have different learning styles these styles help them to learn in different ways. Students become

motivated for different reasons. People have their own and preferred learning styles.

According to Pithers and Mason (1992) definition of learning style is, “relatively consistent pattern of perception, interaction with response to stimuli in a particular learning environment”. According to the standard definition, they refer to “an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills”. A learning style is a way how person perceive information, process information and person’s general approach to learning and problem- solving. Ehrman (1996) stated that “a learning style... can range from mild preference... through to a strong need and to an out and out rigidity”.

Sprenkel (1994) states that traditional lecture are not fulfilling the needs of diverse students as they encourage passive learning. According to Specht & Sandlin (1991) traditional lecture engage students only visually and auditory while they should be given the opportunity to participate in classroom. Traditional way of teaching makes passive learners. Teacher gave visual or auditory information.

Lightbown and Spada (1999), Oxford, Ehrman and Lavine (1991) explore the relationship between learning style and positive outcomes. Students have their own preferred way of learning and many successful students are aware of their preferred learning styles. Those who are visual style learners they tend to use the strategies of taking notes and outlining the main ideas. Those who are auditory style learners tend to use the strategies of recording lectures. They record lectures so that they can hear after the class. Those who are analytical style learners they tend use the strategies of breaking material or information into smaller pieces, whereas those who are global learners prefer strategies of grasping the main idea quickly without attending to details.

It is very important to recognize individual differences and learner's preferred learning styles. This will help teacher in accommodating the learner and making program flexible. According to Ur (1999) it is necessary to provide a variety of activities in classrooms. This will help teacher in sustaining students' interest in learning. Any successful activity continued for long time without variation, may end up boring the learners. On the other hand if various activities are used during lesson they offer a pleasant change. This change has a positive effect on students and restores learners' fading interest. It takes hold on the attention of the learners and lengthens their span of attention.

Games are very flexible in nature and adoptable in classroom. Games consists of various activities and versatile than other classroom activities like exercise. Language games can be combined with other activities including simulation, role play, charts making. Solving riddles and puzzles, surveys, problem solving, debates competitions, jigsaw reading, ranking or matching material, information-gap activities and Total Physical Response Activities. Teacher can use different formats for setting up games in classroom. These formats include individual work, pair work, small group work, large group work and whole-class work.

Versatility of games improves all the four skills including listening, speaking, writing and reading. They facilitate learner by providing language practice and students get opportunity to improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and culture. This communication promotes interaction in the class and offer practice for fundamental language function of real life communication like greetings, requests, invitations and narration.

Allery (2004) and Jones, Mungai and Wong (2002) commented that games can adapt to different style of learners, as well as different learning styles. Games can accelerate the learning process when constructed with different learning

styles in mind. According to the requirement of material games can warm up, start, punctuate and end a lesson.

BENEFITS OF USING GAMES IN ESL CLASSROOMS

There are lots of benefits of using games in teaching and learning second language. According to Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984), "Language learning is a hard work. Effort is required at every moment and be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work." Games are very effective in motivating students, reducing stress, facilitating students with such environment where learning becomes fun and creating an opportunity for communication. Games are helpful for the teachers to create an atmosphere where learning becomes fun and students enjoy learning. Research shows that using games in classrooms are beneficial for teaching second language.

It is beneficial to use games for teaching English in formal settings. Kim (1995) describes the advantages of using games in classroom setting as,

1. Games provide an atmosphere which is change from routine language class.
2. Games motive learners as they are challenging.
3. Games help learners to learn language as language learning is difficult and requires lots of efforts.
4. Games are helpful in facilitating practices for various skills like speaking, writing, reading and listening.
5. Games encourage students to communicate with one another.
6. Games provide a context where meaningful language use is made possible.

Students learn quickly through experimenting new things, discovering what is already exists and they do not know. They even learn when interact with their environment. To increase student motivation teacher need variation in their lessons.

Using games can provide such platform where students can use target language in a meaningful context. Games also provide such situation where students learning can take place without making them conscious that they are studying. There are many benefits of using games in classrooms described by Celina Jones, a freelance blogger association with cartoon network.

Encourages creative and spontaneous use of language

Creativity is highly associated with games it involves higher order thinking. For example in traditional classroom teacher pose questions which are based on facts that's why creativity and personal expression are not involved. On the other hand games allow multiple answering without the fear of being wrong. These are helpful in improving learners' self-esteem and allow the learner to solve the same problems in many different and creative ways.

Promotes communicative competence

Games are very helpful tool in promoting interaction between students. The ways of promoting interaction are pair work and group work. Working in groups encourages students to ask questions and involve in real communication to win or to score. They learn to respect other opinions and wait for their turn. This increases their creative thinking skills about using English language to achieve goals. They try to beat other team in order to win on the behalf of their team. Therefore, games improve their interaction with other members. Games provide a context for meaningful communication. Even if the game involves discrete language items, such as a spelling game, meaningful communication takes place as students seek to understand how to play the game and as they communicate about the game: before, during, and after the game (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005).

Motivate learners

Using Games in ESL classrooms have motivational benefit because they encourage an *incremental*, rather than an *entity* theory of intelligence. It is widely perceived that games have the ability to improve student motivation. (Deesri,2002; Gaudart, 1999; Nemerow, 1996; Shie, 2003). As Children like to participate in games and enjoy playing games. Harmer (1998: 3) asserts that: "Motivation is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action....This motivation brings to class is the biggest factor affecting students and their success." Games are the very effective way to motivate the learners as games are very entertaining and engaging activities. Students belonging to different age group like to play games.

According to Baer and Kaufman (2012), creative exercises raise motivation in the students. Baer and Kaufman (2012) describe that there are two different types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves those activities that satisfy the doer. The intrinsic motivation refers to the feelings of pleasure derived from the fulfilling innate needs for competence and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). It is quite apparent that games mostly increase the intrinsic motivation of students with their fun activities. It is observed that intrinsically motivated people are mostly creative and they enjoy doing what they are doing. (Baer & Kaufman, 2012 :8) intrinsically motivated people mostly seek interest in those situations where they confront challenging activities. By meeting challenges they develop the sense of competence in themselves.

On the other hand, extrinsically motivated behaviors are not inheritably motivated. Extrinsic motivation takes place when people are motivated by outside factors like doing things for rewards. (Baer & Kaufman, 2012, p8). They perform any activity because they are interested in those but they

participate any activity in order to achieve some instrumental end or as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment. However, games do offer various rewards which motivate them extrinsically. It is mostly observed that all people want to win reward for their superior actions or skills.

Language learning becomes entertaining

Students' learning language acquisition can be improved due to motivation and interaction created by games, students can learn better and more interestedly with games than any other way (Avedon & Sutton-Smith, 1971). Students learn language apart from fun and entertainment because students know that they have to use language in class with their fellows (Schultz & Fisher, 1988). Games reduce the stress of language learning, thus students learn quickly without being anxious about their mistakes. In relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students learning become faster and better (Wierus, 1994: 218). Students tend to learn better and quickly in relaxed environment and they remember better when they learn language in a relax environment.

Shy learners also participate

Games have many positive emotional and psychological benefits. It is speculative evidence that games regulate emotions positively. Shy students also get the opportunity to express their opinions and learn quickly because they forget their fear while playing games. Games are considered as an effective learning aid and students get involved in competition with other students and want to work more than game. The variety and intensity that games offer may lower anxiety (Richard-Amato, 1988) and encourage shy learners to take part (Uberman, 1998), especially when games are played in small groups.

ACTIVATE: AS A BOARD GAME

Activate is most famous collection of games for teaching American English in language classrooms. It consists of different games including vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and interactions skills. These games offer practice for language learning in a low stress environment. It is designed to facilitate learners to develop their English language abilities.

While using Activate or any other games in English class some basic guidelines should be followed. Games should be selected according to learners level so that students can easily understand the instructions and procedures for playing games and that every student can experience a level of success.

Activate tells us how to use different games in class. It contains four chapters and each chapter explains how to use a different type of a game in class. It includes Board Games, Picture This, Guess What? and Word Bricks. All chapters consist of four sections including, in the *About* section, there is general description of games and tips to get the most out of them. *Let's Get started* section, there is step-by-step instruction for how to use the games in classroom. In the *Ready for More?* there are additional games or variations for the games, step by step instructions and examples of language for students. In D-I-Y (Do it yourself) section, there is a set of material for immediate use the games presented in this book:

Board Games: 11 ready-to-use game boards.

Picture This Cards: 24 Picture This cards, each containing six thematically related pictures on one side and six corresponding questions for discussion on the opposite side.

Guess What? Cards: 24 Guess What? cards, each side containing a topic followed by six related words. Each card contains topics at two levels: basic (+) and advanced (++)

Word Bricks: 140 Word Bricks, a collection of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and articles.

Board Games

Activate consist of 11 boards games. These boards are very colorful and consist of different English phrases which students have to produce orally of they landed on a specific place. The goal of player is to reach the finish point as soon as possible. Each time they roll a dice the have to reach some space but sometime they are unable to move forward due to penalties.

Each game board is based on some theme which allows learners to express their views about specific topic. Students are required to produce certain expressions by using a variety of vocabulary, different grammatical patterns and many functional meanings. These themes facilitate learners with an opportunity to be creative while using language with their fellows. They express their own ideas about any specific topic. For playing this game in classroom ideal group size is three to four student in a team. In a large group students get less time to practice speaking. Teacher should remind students that the underlying purpose of using these games is to have an opportunity to speak English language. The teacher also instruct student not to write anything on the boards as they have to use them again in future. The allowed time to play this game is 5 to 15 minutes. If students feel that this time is not sufficient to end this game than they have to start early so that they can finish their game in time. Each student rolls the dice on their turn. This ensures that more or less every student get equal chance to play game.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of Activate: Boards games on speaking skills at elementary level. The researcher selected experimental research design for this

study. Experimental research design is good to show the causality between two variables. The researcher wants to check the causality between teaching through games and their impact on learners' language proficiency in ESL classroom. The present study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative elements. Quantitative methodology was used to collect, analyze and interpret the data, while results are discussed qualitatively as well. Use of game boards was the independent variable. Dependent variables of recent study were: Speaking proficiency skills of learners.

As this study evaluated the effectiveness of using game boards in ESL classrooms, therefore, elementary students studying in the government schools of Bahawalpur district were the participants of this study. Furthermore, all government teachers including male and female got equal chance to be the sample of the study. Researcher used two stage sampling techniques for this study to get better results. At first stage, 56 students were selected from one of the section of government school by using convenient sampling technique. Selected students were then divided into two homogeneous groups, i.e. the experimental and the control group on the basis of pretest, by using pair random sampling technique. Each group had 28 students.

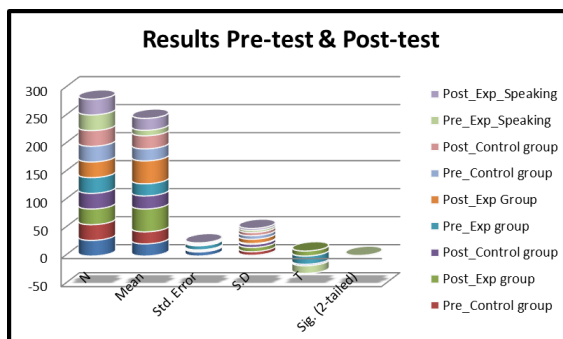
DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Researcher used two tools for this study i.e. tests and questionnaire. Tests used for this experiment includes both pre-test and post-test. Both tests consist of multiple choice questions, short questions and a long narrative question. Pretest and posttest, both have the same difficulty level. Questionnaire was used to know about teachers and students perspective about using games. The questionnaire used to know teachers perspective consist of 20 items and measured on Linkert scales, including strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The questionnaire used to know about students perspective also consist of 20 items. The tests used for this study were pilot tested before administration to the subject of this study. The pilot study was done on the students of class 7th, who were not the subject of this study.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Group	N	Mean	Std. Error	S.D	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre_Exp group	28	21.7143	7.33261	1.38573	.142	.888
Pre_Control group	28	21.4643	1.20677	6.38564		
Post_Exp group	28	40.8571	1.42976	7.56559	8.793	0.000
Post_Control group	28	23.3214	1.06539	5.63753		
Pre_Exp group	28	21.7143	7.33261	1.38573	-14.624	0.000
Post_Exp Group	28	40.8571	1.42976	7.56559		
Pre_Control group	28	21.4643	1.20677	6.38564	-2.635	.014
Post_Control group	28	23.3214	1.06539	5.63753		
Pre_Exp_Speaking	28	9.8929	.71703	3.79414	-13.649	0.000
Post_Exp_Speaking	28	21.2143	.65940	3.48921		



The researchers compared both groups on the variable of Pre-test. A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean score of both groups. The obtained data shows that there is no difference in pre-test achievements of both groups. On the other hand, the results collected from post-tests reveal that there is a great difference between the achievements of experimental and control group. The results reveal that the students show better results when being taught by using games in classrooms. Games engage them in learning activity without being bore.

Games motivate them not only extrinsically but also intrinsically too, as games offer challenges and students want to meet these challenges. In this way they take interest in learning through games.

Games have countless impact on speaking skills of the learners. These games offer multiple choices for students to utilize words to create unlimited sentences for their use. By using communicative games in classroom teacher utilized their enthusiasm for learning speaking skills. Activate: Board games offer many topics for students to express their views. It facilitates them with a platform where they can feel free to express their view point.

The results obtained from teachers and students' questionnaire shows that the teachers were agreed that games motive their students. It engages them in language learning activities without being bore or passive. They participate in games and forget their shyness. They learn from their classmate while working in groups. Furthermore, students were of the view that games encourage them to take part in classroom activities they enjoyed learning through games. The teachers were less authoritative with them while teaching through games.

CONCLUSION

Games enhance learners' perception by a positive classroom atmosphere where students show willingness to learn and communicate with each other. They help each other in a fun learning environment. They learn teamwork, cooperation and communication in non-threatening environment. The results collected from experimental group regarding the motivation of students show that games motivate learners. The obtained data shows that majority of teacher were agreed that games motivate learner to engage in language learning activities. The participants of experimental group reported that they enjoy

learning and experience fun while being taught through games. They felt more confidence while communicating with other fellows.

The outcomes from the recent study show the use of games in the teaching of English language has positive effect for both language learners and language teachers. Recent study can be beneficial for second language teachers, curriculum designers, textbook writers and language teachers associations. They are also supportive for language learners. Games can be implemented by teachers in classrooms as regular teacher strategies. As games are beneficial for students and improve their speaking and writing skills. Games teach them speaking competence and writing accuracy. Games also improve their confidence and correctness which is supportive for examination point of view.

Games can be implemented in classroom because games improve students' motivation level. Games support language teacher who face students' disinterest, passivity, boredom and lack of interest in learning. Games are the solution for English language teachers and solve their problems as games motivate learners not only intrinsically but also extrinsically. Students take part in class activities without being bored and show positive results. Due to the positive effect of the use of games in language classroom, it is important for curriculum designers to add them in regular syllabus. Games should be the part of curriculum as communicative activities and language teaching program. This will allow teachers to plan their lessons accordingly to teach the authentic use of language. Games should be the part of curriculum. In this way games help the institution to reduce drop out ratio and increases the enrollment of the institution. Games as teaching and learning strategies can motivate learner those learners who were introduced to fear in traditional classrooms. Games encourage those students who were neglected in traditional classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- This study focused on the productive skills i.e. speaking skills of the students. However, other skills were not included in this study. Therefore, a research on how games affect the receptive skills of students will provide extra information.
- This study was conducted for only four weeks which is short duration of time. In order to get more confidential results about the effect of games on students a further study can be conducted for long period of time.
- Textbooks were written for teaching English language through traditional methods. So, it is recommended that textbooks should be written including game based activates for teaching English language. Since the results of the study are in favors of teaching through games, it is motivated that teachers should adopt games as useful activates for teaching English as a second language.

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