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GAMES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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ІГРИ В НАВЧАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ В ПОЧАТКОВІЙ ШКОЛІ

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ИГРЫ В ОБУЧЕНИИ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА КАК ИНОСТРАННОГО В НАЧАЛЬНОЙ ШКОЛЕ

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This paper focuses on the use of games in teaching English as a foreign language and it argues that games can be a good teaching method when teaching primary schoolchildren. Through fun activities children can learn a language better as learning becomes natural for them since these activities do not make them conscious that they are learning a language. It explains why games should be used as a teaching method in order to maximize the positive result on language learning.

Keywords: *English as a foreign language; primary school; language acquisition; teaching methods.*

Статтю присвячено використанню ігор у навчанні англійської мови як іноземної. Стверджується, що ігри можуть бути ефективним методом навчання у початковій школі. Через захопливі види діяльності діти краще набувають мовних навичок і вмінь, оскільки в процесі навчання вони не усвідомлюють, що вивчають мову, засвоєння іноземної мови відбувається природно. Також доводиться, чому ігри повинні використовуватися на уроці англійської мови з метою максимізувати позитивний результат у її вивченні.

Ключові слова: *англійська як іноземна мова; початкова школа; вивчення мови; методи навчання.*

Статья посвящена использованию игр в обучении английскому языку как иностранному. Утверждается, что игры могут быть эффективным методом обучения в начальной школе. Благодаря захватывающим видам деятельности дети лучше приобретают языковые навыки и умения, поскольку в процессе обучения они не осознают, что изучают язык, усвоение иностранного языка происходит естественно. Также доказано, почему игры должны использоваться на уроке английского языка с целью максимизировать положительный результат в его изучении.

Ключевые слова: *английский как иностранный язык; начальная школа; изучение языка; методы обучения.*

Language acquisition has been one of the central topics in linguistics and cognitive theory. Learning a first language is something every child does successfully, in a matter of a few years and without the need for formal lessons. With language so close to the core of what it means to be human, it is not surprising that children's acquisition of language has received so much attention. It is generally believed that children enjoy an advantage over adults in learning languages because of their 'plasticity'. According to Chomsky (1957),

humans are equipped with a 'language acquisition device', which enables them to acquire the language in a way that goes beyond simple habitual formation. Language by nature is very abstract and intangible. Children, on the other hand, are very literal and concrete. Language acquisition is fostered if it occurs in a context that is supportive and motivating, communicative and referential, developmentally appropriate, and feedback rich. There is nothing that engages children more than teaching English through play. Indeed a bored class will take in less than half of what a teacher says and retain none of it. Whereas an attentive, interested and involved class, learning through fun English Language games, will take in 100% of the lesson and retain up to 80% of it. Using language games in class has got to be one of the most exciting ways to teach children English.

In this paper we discuss the importance of using games and fun activities in teaching English as a foreign language in the primary school.

Learning through fun is one of the factors that matters to kids. Some educators believe that kids learn best through play. And what is true of English-speaking children, in this case, will also be true of English-learning students. Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development posits that information from the external world is transformed and internalized through language. Since language is both a symbolic system of communication and a cultural tool used to transmit culture and history, play is an essential part of both language development and a child's understanding of the external world. When children are at play, they are in a constant dialogue either with self or others. Games are a great way to make learning fun. Not only do games play on the competitive nature of most children, but games also give them a goal to accomplish. When you win a game, you have really done something, and you can feel good about your success. Play also allows children the opportunity to develop speech and language skills as well listening skills. Children talk and listen while they play. Whether this is during solitary play which typically involves self talk and narration or play with a companion, children communicate to add purpose to their play. The more vocabulary a child is exposed to on a day-to-day basis, the greater the variety of words a child will incorporate into play.

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. This eases the fear of negative evaluation, the concern of being negatively judged in public, and which is one of the main factors inhibiting language learners from using the target language in front of other people (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986).

There are many games that can be used in an ESL classroom. Here are a few games that are super fun for young students.

- **Simon Says.** The classic Simon Says is great for practicing listening skills. You can use it to review body parts ("Simon says touch your *head*") or prepositions ("Simon says put your foot **on** your chair").

- **Thumb Ball.** Get a light coloured beach ball and write multiple questions on it. Then have the students sit in a circle. The objective of the game is to play catch. When a student catches the ball, she has to answer the question which her right thumb's touching. If she drops the ball, then you get to throw it back at the circle. Continue the game till all the questions have been answered. Simple games like these will not only help you practice lessons with your students in the class, but help the class bond too! I'd love to hear any other ideas that you have to make classroom learning more fun.

- **Memory.** Memory is great for learning vocabulary. Try putting a vocabulary word on one card and a picture showing the word on another. Or put synonyms or antonyms on two different cards. Lay all the cards on the table and have students try to remember where the matches are.

- **What's in the box?** The Teacher shows cards with pictures of clothes on them and asks: "Is it a shirt?" etc., and students answer: "Yes, it is/No, it isn't". The Teacher chooses 1 student to come up to the front, take one card without showing it to the others and put it into the box. The rest of the group asks questions: "Is it a...?", and the chosen student answers: "Yes, it is/No, it isn't." The first person to guess what's in the box comes to the front, chooses the next item, and puts it into the box.

- **What colour is it?** The Teacher shows cards with pictures of colours on them and asks: "Is it green?" etc., and students answer: "Yes, it is/No, it isn't". The Teacher chooses 1 student to come up to the front, take one card without showing it to the others and put it into the box. The rest of the group asks questions: "Is it a...?", and the chosen student answers: "Yes, it is/No, it isn't." The first person to guess what's in the box comes to the front, chooses the next item, and puts it into the box.

The benefits of using games in language-learning were summed up by Chen (2005). According to the researcher, 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.

According to Deleżyńska (2012), before choosing an activity for use with a class, it is necessary to consider some criteria which should be helpful in making decisions whether to use the particular activity, to reject it or to adapt it. First of all, it is essential to provide a clear and meaningful purpose for using language which capitalizes on young learners' desire to communicate, for example, activities which involve a game, puzzling something out, or getting missing information from another person. All these make sense and are meaningful to young learners. Next important criterion is to challenge the learners and make them think so that they are more engaged and so process the language more deeply. It is noteworthy to select activities which create a need or pressure for children to use English, for when the game is very exciting; pupils tend to use the mother tongue. It is meaningful to provide activities which allow children to be creative with the language and give them opportunity to experiment with it. This will help the young learners to test out their hypotheses about the language and assist the development of their internal language system.

Games that are used in teaching can be divided into categories in many different ways. One way of dividing educational games is by categorizing them into groups depending on their model. Sigurgeirsson (1995) divided games into the following categories: games for dividing larger groups into smaller groups, introduction-games, group games, physical games, scavenger hunt games, educational games, theoretical expression games, drawing and colouring games, educational card games, word games, story games and question games. Another way of dividing educational games is by categorizing them into cooperative games and competitive games. Games in which teams of players compete against each other also count as competitive games. Language games like any other games involve learners in a healthy competition that can help them learn more. "As long as no one is forced to participate, competition can be positive and encourage player discovery, examination and learning." (Vernon). Thus, creating the right type of language games can foster this healthy, beneficial competition in the classroom. In contrast, cooperative games either have all the players as winners or all the players as losers; everyone cooperates to defeat the game. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills

and employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. Thus, education can benefit from the use of both competitive and cooperative games to enhance levels of classroom interaction.

Conclusion. The art of teaching English to young learners is a specific skill which needs specific training to be performed effectively. Teachers need to understand how children learn a language; in order to make language learning effective, child psychology and age have to be given the highest priority. In order to get children involved in the language class and to ensure a natural anxiety-free language learning environment fun activities and games should be applied. They encourage and increase cooperation, keep students motivated and allow giving practice in both language and social skills.

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