

RESEARCH ARTICLE

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES: TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH IN A FUN-FILLED ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

“Studies serve for Delight, for Ornament and for Ability” (Francis Bacon). Various researches are being conducted to make teaching of English interesting and easy for the learners to grab the language. Teaching is no more limited to teachers’ talk, with the emergence of communicative method, students get the opportunity to know and learn the language in meaningful and significant social situations. In almost all professional and educational sectors people are given the training of English as it is the only common medium of communication. Incorporation of fun in form of games and activities in ESL syllabus has motivated and made learners retain it for a longer period. Fear of learning a new language and errors involved in producing it in proper situations, have made learners introvert. The present paper highlights on the different kinds of methodologies, through which English can be taught in a fun way to first generation learners.

Key Words: Delight, Studies, Generation, Incorporation.

INTRODUCTION

Learning is “a bitter medicine that needs the sugar – coating of entertainment to become palatable” (Resnick, 2004). Introduction of games and activities in any learning situations provides fun and motivates students to learn the target language in a relaxed manner. English being the Lingua Franca, the knowledge of it becomes important. In almost all the sectors of education English as a subject is introduced because it has become the only common medium of communication. “In recent years language researchers and practitioners have shifted their focus from developing individual linguistic skills to the use 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” (Chen, 2005).

The present paper highlights on the different kinds of activities, through which English can be taught in a fun way to the first generation learners. Activities in form of games “add a variety to dry, serious process of language instructions” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000), as the main goal of language games is to make learners use the language. The coinage of the term “Edutainment” is an integration of “education” and “entertainment” which has been defined by Buckingham and Scanlon (2000) as a hybrid genre that relies heavily on visual material, on narrative or game like formats, and on more informal, less didactic style of address. The term “edutainment” promises both fun and learning together. Besides that if students are trained with the help of games it

will strengthen their language skills, also it will help to develop social skills and build strong relationships while they interact with each other. M. Martha Lengeling and Casey Malarcher (1997) stated the ways in which students are benefited through the use of games in the classroom. Their statement was “in an effort to supplement lesson plans in the ESL classroom, teachers often turn to games. The justification for using games in the classroom has been well demonstrated as benefiting students in variety of ways. These benefits range from cognitive aspects of language learning to more cooperative group dynamics.”

They classify the benefits as follows

Affective

- Games lower the affective filter
- They encourage creative and spontaneous use of language
- They also promote communicative competence
- Games are both motivating and fun

Cognitive

- Games reinforce learning
- They both review and extend learning
- Games focus on grammar in a communicative manner

Class Dynamics

- Games are extremely student centered
- The teacher acts only as facilitator
- Games build class cohesion
- They can foster whole class participation
- Games promote healthy competition

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Adaptability

- Games can be easily adjusted for age, level and interest
- They utilize all four skills
- Games require minimum preparation after the initial development stage

A Shift: Teacher centered classroom to Student centered class

Earlier a language was learnt with a sheer hard work, where learners needed to make efforts to understand, repeat and make accurate usage of it either in speaking or in writing. With the passage of time communication and interactive approaches to language learning had made learners learn a language with ease. According to Lozanov (1978), "the main aim of teaching is not memorization, but understanding and creative solution of problems." Children can be best engaged in learning English through games. Researchers show that teacher talk has got nil retention in children where as a classroom where games are conducted as a part of teaching process, showed that 80% of the teaching is retained by the students, as Birova (2013) pointed out that, "The game method as a strategy in language education is considered as a free learning activity that gives students opportunity to train and use language with practical purpose and to use their creative skills in joyful atmosphere."

The usage of games in any language teaching is not limited to any age, but according to some methodologists game cannot be a method in language education, even others are of opinion that implementation of games can only be done at primarily level to build the basic skills of language. In the report given by Nuyen and Nga (2003) stated, "The interviewed teacher reported that their students seem to learn new vocabulary more quickly and retain it better when it was applied in a relaxed and comfortable environment such as while playing games." As per Birova (2013), "Games are one of the best training activities and also an active break. Many games provide repeated use of language forms. By making the language convey information and opinion, games provide the key features of drill with the opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication. Games give practice in all skills of language, that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing; in all stages of teaching and learning (presentation, repetition, recombination and free use of language) and for many types of communication tasks (encouraging, criticizing, agreeing, explaining etc.)."

Role of the Teacher

The teacher plays an important role in the introduction of the games as per the level of her pupils. The trainer needs to decide upon the tasks which need to be culturally suitable for students. It has been rightly suggested by Aggarwal (1998) that "any method good or bad, links up the teacher and the pupil into an organic relationship with constant mutual interaction...every teacher and the Educationalist knows that even the best curriculum and the most perfect syllabus remain dead unless quickened into life by the right method of teaching and the right kind of teachers." The teacher needs to decide whether to join the activities with the students or to be the silent observer. If the teacher gets involve in the activity then s/he will not be able to judge the learners independently and

provide valuable help to the other groups. It is necessary for the teacher to be aloof from the activities, so that she can observe the performance of the participant and note down the mistakes which later can be rectified. The teacher needs to be careful to see that errors are not corrected at frequent intervals as this reduces the confidence and makes students hesitant and insure in their speech. The educator should also find alternatives to help students come out of their inhibitions and express their views in a manner they are comfortable, as this helps in driving out communicative difficulties. To start any game, planning and organization has a vital role. The teacher plans whether s/he will want the students to play the game in pairs or in groups. It is suggested that pair work provides students with for intensive listening and speaking practice. As per the idea of Birova (2013), it is stated that a new game should be introduced to students in the following manner:

- a. Explanation by the teacher to the class
- b. Demonstration of parts of the game by the teacher and one to two learners
- c. Trial by a group in front of the class
- d. Any key language or instructions written on the board
- e. First try by the group
- f. Key language removed from the board

Objectives

In this world of globalization the art of speaking has got an immense role to play compared to the other skills of learning. It has been observed that first year Engineering students of our college are lacking in the power of communication and as a result of this during the campus interview their performance is not satisfactory, even though they score good marks in their engineering subjects. It has been noticed that, if students are only given lectures during the class sessions, they lack interest and often tend to bunk classes. Therefore keeping in mind the background and the level of the learners different activities in form of games are thought of to bring in the interest and make them fluent with the language. Moreover taking the ideas from Birova (2013) regarding the manner of introduction of new games (above mentioned) to the students is followed, to avoid confusion in them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects: 30 first year students of Engineering, who are not fluent with the English language and who feels shy to speak in front of the class are chosen as my subjects. They belong to the age group between 17 and 18 years.

Materials: Five different types of games are chosen, keeping on mind the background and the level of the students. The materials are gathered from different authentic sources and are nicely graded.

Procedure: The games are played individually, in pairs and in groups. Each game was played for two days so that students get the better understanding of the language. Preparatory time is provided to the learners as they are exposed to the following types of activities for the first time. The games are as follows:

Quiz Time (Individual Work)

- Students are divided into groups of five
- An audio CD is played on the theme 'Kolkata' for the first time
- Quiz is played after the audio clipping gets over
- Audio CD is played for the second time
- Each student were asked to say five sentences related to the theme they have heard

Skills developed: Listening and Speaking

This game helped students to identify new words, which helped to develop their vocabulary skill and it also made them think as they need to say five sentences in English on the theme "Kolkata".

Drawing Class (Pair work)

- Teacher gives a picture to the student
- Student observes it carefully and dictates it his friend
- The other student has to draw the picture listening to the description of his friend
- Once the picture is drawn, the student has to say five sentences about it.

Skills developed: Listening and Speaking

Through this game student learn how to give instructions which is helping them to develop speaking skills as they have to use different kinds of words and frame sentences when they are giving instructions. It also helps in developing their listening skills as the person has to listen to the instruction and do the drawing accordingly.

Tell a Story (Individual Work)

- Teacher gives situations to students
- Students build up short stories taking into account the situation given

Skill developed: Speaking Skill

Students get motivated to speak when they are given situations into which they had been. This game gives them the space to think and make interesting stories from their real life.

Let's Talk (Pair work)

- Students are shown video clippings where the dialogues are kept in the mute state
- They need to form dialogues of their own to suit the video

Skills developed: Listening and Speaking

In this game students are made to use their imagination in developing their speech seeing the video which is kept in a mute state. This game helps students to think out of the box and showcase their hidden creative talents.

What a situation? (Group work)

- Students are divided into groups of five
- Teacher gives a single topic like On-line Shopping and provides each group with different situation like

- conversation between mother and daughter-in-law, Boss and the Secretary, Co-passengers, husband and wife etc
- Members in the group need to think of conversation on the given theme and produce it in front of the class
- Teacher gives her feedback after all the groups have finished

Skilled developed: Listening and Speaking

This game helps learners to know what kind of vocabulary they will be using when they are in formal or in formal situations. Teacher can help students to know how to converse with people of different genre. The different stress, tone and intonation needed during conversation is also taught to them.

RESULTS

The main aim of the games was to make learners speak in English. The result of these games showed that students who had the inhibition to speak in front of the class due to their lack of vocabulary and knowledge of the English language took interest in participating in the game. It has been observed that thirty students who were chosen for these tasks have shown positive responses. They participated in each task given to them and at the end of the last activity it was seen that students attitude towards learning English has changed. Earlier the term 'English' would have frightened them but after ten days of training with the help of different activities, that suited their age and level as well as their background, it was found that they did not have the fear of English. Moreover, competitions in the game, made the learners all more motivated and interested as they all wanted to be the winners and for that they made efforts to use the language. In each of the tasks teacher gave her feedback at the end, as too much of her intervention would make learners too conscious to produce the language. Each activity was explained to the students clearly and demonstrations were given before the task was carried out. Students were also explained the need to bring in variation in their speech, so as to avoid monotony. Thus the aim was successfully carried out and according to the view of the students; games helped them to produce the language with ease.

Conclusion

Taking into account the above mentioned games and the outcome of each game, I can say that games in language teaching is an wonderful tool, as learners can learn English with ease, as the fear of getting punished in front of the class is not there. It has been rightly pointed out by Uberman (1998, 87) that, "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..... Games encourage, entertain, teach and promote fluency and communicative skills. If not for any of these reasons, they should be used just because they help students to see beauty in foreign language and not just problems that at times seems overwhelming."

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