FACING DIFFICULTIES WITH GAMES IN TEFL FOR YOUNG LEARNERS AND MINIMIZING THESE CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study further problems that teachers and younger students may face during playing games in English as a foreign language classes and finding some relevant solutions to these challenges. This study was designed as a mixed-method study. A total of 12 teachers from different parts of Uzbekistan and 12 students of grade 6^B of Chust Specialized Boarding School N:7 participated in this study. An online and offline questionnaire and a video were used as the data collection. The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using content analysis. The result of the study demonstrated that teachers should deal with problems such as failure to control of the class and reduction in students' motivation whereas students may lose their interest to other activities and argue with each other during playing games. Although playing games are a good method to use in the class, above problems should find their solutions in order to make games rather more effective.

Key words: games, EFL, questionnaire, English teachers, video, students.

INTRODUCTION

English teachers can easily conduct a lesson effectively and interestingly with the use of games for young students. However, do games end up with a bad result instead of improving teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL)?

Various studies have been conducted about the role of games in teaching English (Muhammet Demirbilek & Tarik Talan & Khadeegha Alzouebi, 2022; Sochetra Hang, 2017) These articles have consistently found the values and some side-effects of games during English classes. According to Harfield (1999), 'A game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun'. He confidently stated 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 the term. They can be used at all stages of the progression from controlled to free practice, serving at one end of the range as a memory aid and repetition drill, at the other as a chance to use the language freely and as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. They can also serve as a diagnostic tool for teacher, who can note areas of difficulty and take appropriate remedial action (1999, p.7)"

Rather new theories reveal that: "The theory behind gamification in education implies that learners learn best when they are also having fun (Fulton, 2019). Not only that, but kids learn best when they have objectives, milestones, and accomplishments to strive for, all while remaining enjoyable to the learner. According to the Gamified Learning Theory, gamification does not directly affect learning but rather activates a learning-related behavior through a mediating or regulating process (Zaric, Roepke, Lukarov & Schroeder, 2021)". Gamification in education is the process of turning the classroom and everyday activities into games (Haiken, 2021)

Despite determination of many benefits of games, valuable solutions to challenges that come from games have yet to be deeply researched. The implications of the gamification study deserve to be explored further.

This study set out to answer the following questions:

•What barriers may teachers and young students face during English classes that are held with the use of games?

•How can teachers minimize these challenges?

The research conducted in Chust Specialized Boarding School No: 7 with 25 students from 2nd English group of 6^B.

This paper first discusses several examples of survey-based research into problems of game usage in TEFL, then, goes on with some possible relevant solutions.

METHODOLOGY

Facing difficulties with games in TEFL for young learners and minimizing these challenges was prepared according to the procedure used by the study of 'An Examination of the Factors and Challenges to Adopting Gamification in English Foreign Language Teaching' written by Muhammet Demirbilek, Tarik Talan and Khadeegha Alzouebi(2022).

Traditionally, many advantages and drawbacks of teaching English through games have been taken into measurement by plenty of researches. On the contrary, overcoming with some more problems of games in TEFL is still open.

This study was designed as a mixed-method study. A mixed-method research aimed involving important elements of both qualitative and quantitative research in order to find an answer to the research question. A mixed-method study uses data collection methods such as an online teacher survey, a video and a questionnaire from students.

The research held in the class of 6^B at Chust Specialized Boarding School No: 7 (hereinafter: Chust SBS-7).The research participants were 12 teachers working in different private or public schools in Uzbekistan and 25 students from 6th grade of Chust SBS-7. Participants were chosen voluntarily; if some teachers wanted to join in the survey, they were always welcomed to fill an online questionnaire. When it comes

to students, 1st, 5th and 6th graders of Chust SBS-7 were asked whether they would participate in the research. Nevertheless, only the students of 6^B expressed their consent.

An online teacher survey, making video of students while they were playing games in English lesson and a questionnaire from students were used as a data collection instrument in order to analyze what kind of issues teachers and students may face during classroom.

The first survey intended to research teachers from different regions in order to find problems and little amount of solutions while using games in TEFL. This survey consisted of 2 multiple choice questions, 2 single textboxes and 1 checkboxes question (See appendix 1). The survey link was sent to 25 teachers via Telegram messenger, 12 teachers voluntarily responded to survey questions. 7 teachers skipped to answer the question 3 which was single textbox question that means teachers should write their answers (Q3: What kind of methods do you use in order to tackle problems that come from gamification?)

Next data collection was a video
 (https://youtube.com/@sevaragafforova6923?si=RovuSV0utB6eJalV). The video recorded 25 students of 6B when they were in an English class in the 3rd floor room N:_ in Chust SBS-7. The aim of making video was determining authentically teachers and students' problems during playing games. The video recorded on 18th October, 2023. In the video, students played 'Bottle in the sea' game which was intended to practice a writing skill of young learners with a team.

Description of 'Bottle in the sea' is following:

1. First, the teacher draws the image of the sea in the blackboard, also draws a bottle in the middle of the sea. Then, inside of the bottle draws a letter. In the words teacher helps students to create an imagination of the sea, the bottle and the letter.

2. Next, the teacher explains the rules of games. Teacher should divide the class into two or three groups- it depends on numbers of students.

3. The teacher writes random capital letters vertically on the board. Then, tells students that each group should write one letter in which each sentences should start consecutively with the letters that teacher have written on the board. Students can write the letter with any topic such as SOS letter, love letter or etc.

4. The objectives of this game are to learn team-working and improving writing skill in a fun way.

The third type of data collection was a questionnaire from students. When the online survey found of difficulties of teachers, a questionnaire aimed to learn problems of young students in playing games. Additionally, the questionnaire helped to find out whether students satisfied with games. The questionnaire included 4 multiple choice

questions and 1 textbox question; overall 5 questions (appendix 2). Participants of the questionnaire were 12 students of grade 6B and the survey was conducted in an English room on the 2nd floor of Chust SBS-7. Students filled a paper form of the questionnaire on their 2nd pair of lessons on Saturday 21st of October, 2023.

Overall, in the first and third survey I was a passive observer whereas in the video I was an active participant of the survey.

First step was analyzing young students when the lesson was conducted with the usage of different games for a month. Passive analysis showed that difficulties for both teachers and students often arose. Tackling with those issues was very important and next steps should have been taken.

Secondly, in order to find exact main problems data collection was absolutely needed. At first, an online survey was taken from different teachers (appendix 1). The aim of this online questionnaire was observing teacher's problems and their solutions when they were conducting a lesson with the use of games. In addition, teachers named one effective game during filling the online form.

In the third step, an authentic video of an English lesson which was held through games was recorded. A video helped to identify difficulties for the teacher and students by watching a real lesson and find out suitable solutions for each problem.

Next, a questionnaire for students came to the stage in order to become aware of students' issues with games and their satisfaction from games to improve their English learning.

Final stage was collecting all data results into one place and presenting some appropriate solutions.

An online questionnaire was created with SurveyMonkey. And data management and analysis were performed using SPSS 4.3.2 (2023).

Almost each observation showed possible problems that teacher and students may face during the class if they play games such as learners could lose their interest to other activities, decrease in students' motivation or teacher cannot control the class. And because of an offline questionnaire from students revealed weather games have helped students to learn and revise English or not.

The first prepared online questionnaire had failed before presented to teachers because of some techniqal problems. It was prepared by using Google Form, it was, however, rather hard to save prepared questions or to find results after living the site. It might be also my fault that I had a lack of knowledge on how to use Google Form to make a questionnaire. And few years ago, I had heard about SurveyMonkey and I decided to make my questionnaire on this software. This app revealed the prepared results and was ready to analyze them.

The data obtained from the video and the questionnaire which was held around students of 6^B at Chust SBS-7 was analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships to explain the data obtained. The data obtained should first be conceptualized and then organized by putting them into a systematic and logical form that corresponds to the concepts formed. Accordingly, the themes that explain the data should be identified. The goal is to present the results to the reader in an organized and interpreted form (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

As there was one textbox question (the answers should be written by students openly) on the questionnaire from students, content analysis was needed. During analyzing process, each questionnaire that was filled by students was collected. Each answers of each students browsed carefully, then every answers was counted according to their categories in order to produce the results. After counting, the chart was created by Microsoft Word with available percentages.

RESULT

Following diagrams indicates answers of teachers from an online questionnaire:

In the first question of the online questionnaire that was taken from teachers, as a pie chart shows, 25 percent of participant teachers would end up the game if their class starts to make a noise; the other 25 % teachers answered they would not quiet them. 4 out of 12 teachers claimed that when the noise rises, they would shout to students to prevent the noise. Other 2 teachers gave the other answers of themselves.

This chart shows what kind of problems may teachers face while they were playing games in English classes. About 42 per cent of questionnaire participants considered the problem of losing interests of students to other activities. Failure to

1. How can you quiet a noisy class during games?

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

I will end up the game	25%	3
I will not quiet them	25%	3
I will shout to them to stop noises	33.33%	4
Other (please specify)	16.67%	2

2. What kind of problems do you face if you use games to teach your class

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

Loss of interest to other activities	41.67%	5
Failure to control	66.67%	8
Decrease in students' motivation	8.33%	1
Other (please specify)	0%	0

4. What kind of mode do you use mostly with games?

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

Individual work	8.33%	1
Pair work	16.67%	2
Group work	25%	3
It depends on the game and the students' age	50%	6

control of the class was chosen as the problem by 8 teachers. Only 1 teacher showed decreasing motivation of students as a main problem.
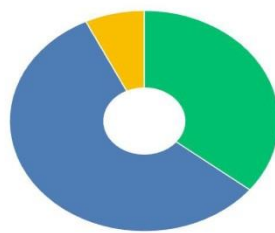
When it comes to fourth question in selecting a type of mode during gamification, 1 teacher uses mostly an individual work according to the chart and 2 teachers use mainly pair work. 25% of teachers claimed they mostly use group work with games whereas half of participants considered that type of mode depends on the game and students' age.

* Question 3 and question 5 were open text questions, the chart was not created, therefore.

Following diagrams indicates answers of 12 students of 6^B at Chust SBS-7 from an offline questionnaire:
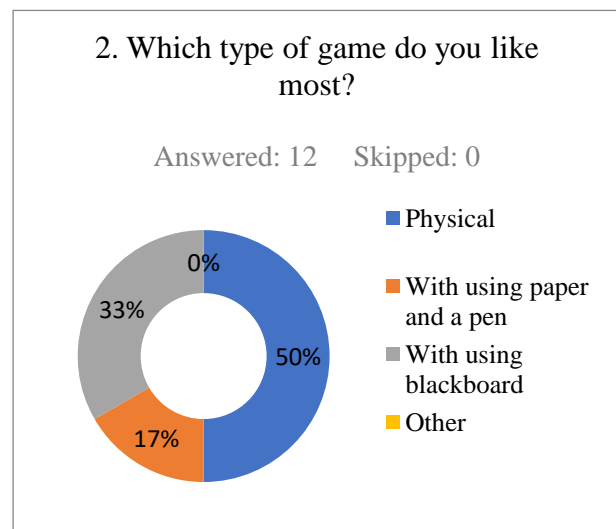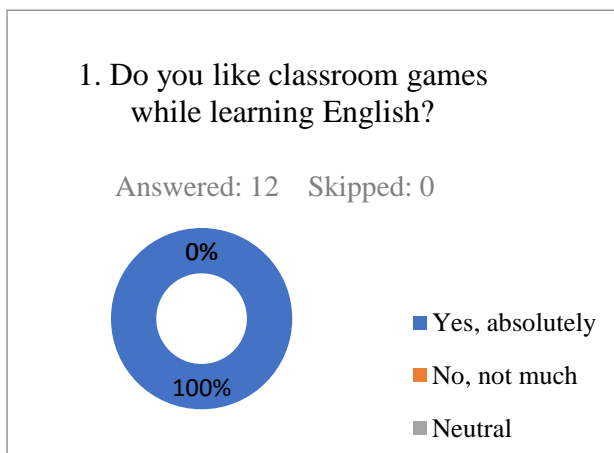
100% students agreed on the question 1.

Q2: 50 per cent of students chose physical games as a liked game while 17 percent of students liked games when used paper and a pen. Games that are played with the help of blackboard were chosen by 33% participant students.
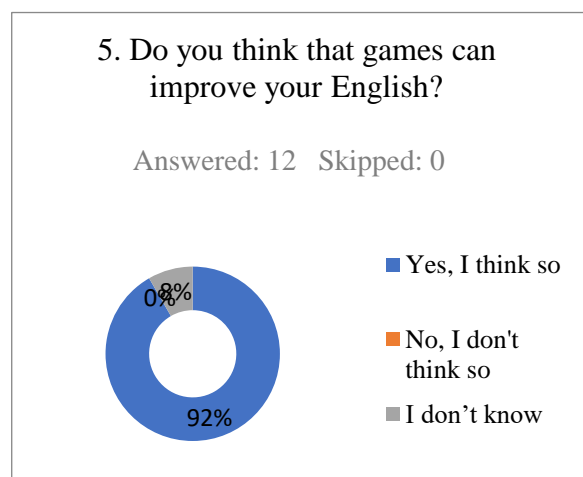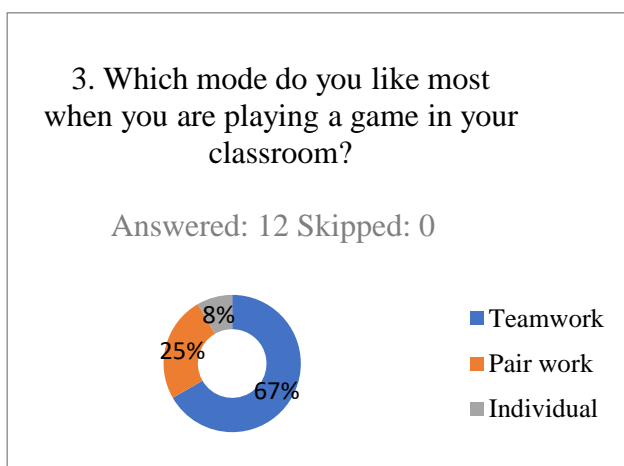
Q3: the chart shows that 8 students out of 12 like teamwork whereas 3 of them (25%) choses pair work and only 1 person prefers individual games.

*Question 4 was open text question.

Q5: When asked from students weather games can help them to improve their English 11 students (89%) agreed, only 1 student was not sure.
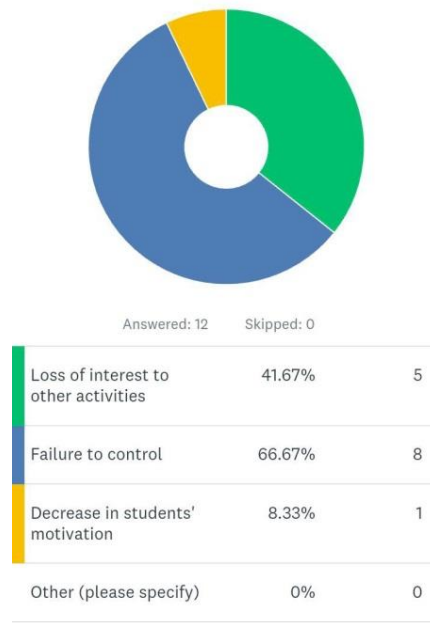
DISCUSSION

The first questionnaire was organized to be aware of key problems that many teachers may face during their English classes with games. The result indicates that different teachers use different tactics to reduce noise in their class on question 1.

1. How can you quiet a noisy class during games?

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

I will end up the game	25%	3
I will not quiet them	25%	3
I will shout to them to stop noises	33.33%	4
Other (please specify)	16.67%	2

2. What kind of problems do you face if you use games to teach your class

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

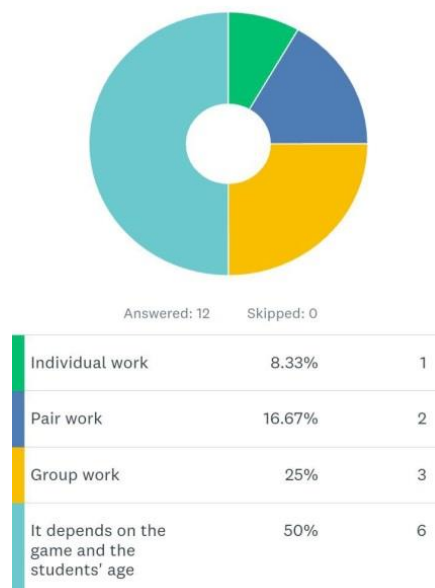|		
Loss of interest to other activities	41.67%	5
Failure to control	66.67%	8
Decrease in students' motivation	8.33%	1
Other (please specify)	0%	0

Almost all ways of stopping noise in class are about in the same percentage without huge difference between them.

3. What kind of methods do you use in order to tackle problems that come from gamification?

Responses	5

Group work, pair work

2 months ago

By surfing the net

2 months ago

Controlling children while gaming

2 months ago

I try to play different games that are related to planned topics.

2 months ago

It depends on problems

2 months ago

4. What kind of mode do you use mostly with games?

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

Individual work	8.33%	1
Pair work	16.67%	2
Group work	25%	3
It depends on the game and the students' age	50%	6

Failure to control of the class was the most problems of teachers according to question 2 whereas students' loss of interest to other activities got the second place of main problems.

The third question was skipped by 7 teachers, and the other 5 teachers did not responded quite appropriately.

When it comes to mode selection, half of participant teachers answered as mode selection were dependent on type of games and the students' age. Quarter of teachers selected group work to play games with their students.

Authentic video of students showed real problems of learners while they were playing games with grade 6^B students of Chust SBS-7. The main problems were huge noise of the class, little disagreement of students with each other and loss of the control by teacher.

Results from students' questionnaire (See Appendix 2) showed that all participants of questionnaire liked playing games mostly physical activities during English classes. Students prefer the games when they are in groups rather than pair work or individual one. About all students agreed that games can improve their English language. When it comes to students' problems according to findings of questionnaire, students may highly argue with each other and participants of questionnaire showed this problem as a most main problem. Then, lack of English knowledge can prevent all students join in games to have a lot of fun; wrote 25% students as their problems.

These problems demands crucial solutions in order to improve gamification in English classes with young students. One of them can be shooting a video of students while they are playing games, then, showing that video to the students if they can be embarrassed from their real view of themselves. This can deal with problems such as noisy class and failure to control. Another solution can be a polite agreement with students: Learners will play more fun games only if they master well the given topics and perform tasks on time. This can encourage students to other activities, too.

These results experienced almost similar problems of teachers during gamification in English classes with existing studies. The data contribute a clearer understanding of students' problems and suggested solutions when they are in games to improve their English. Due to the lack of data on the given solutions, further research is needed to establish successful solutions to handle problems in gamification.

APPENDIX 1

Gamification in teaching English

1. How can you quiet a noisy class during games?

- I will end up the game
- I will not quiet them
- I will shout to them to stop noises

- Other (please specify)

2. What kind of problems do you face if you use games to teach your class?
- Loss of interest to other activities
- Failure to control
- Decrease in students' motivation
- Other (please specify)

3. What kind of methods do you use in order to tackle problems that come from gamification?

4. What kind of mode do you use mostly with games?
- Individual work
- Pair work
- Group work
- It depends on the game and the students' age

5. Can you name one effective game that you have used in your class.

APPENDIX 2
Questionnaire for students
Grade: 6^B
Level: Elementary
Name:

1. Do you like classroom games while learning English?
- ○ Yes, absolutely
- ○ No, not much
- ○ Neutral

2. Which type of game do you like most?
- ○ Physical
- ○ With using paper and a pen
- ○ With using blackboard
- ○ Other (please specify)

3. Which mode do you like most when you are playing a game in your classroom?

   ○ Teamwork

   ○ Pair work

   ○ Individual

4. What problems do you have in playing games?

5. Do you think that games can improve your English?

   ○ Yes, I think so

   ○ No, I don't think so

   ○ I don't know

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