USING GAMES TO IMPROVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS' LANGUAGE SKILLS AND TEACHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS USING GAMES AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the role of games in promoting students' language skills and their teachers' attitude toward it. In order to collect the data, the researchers employed a 25-item tests which was given to 20 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in. Then, the students of 48th school in Namangan who were randomly divided into two groups of 10 learners functioning as control and experimental groups. The students in the experimental group received games in their language lessons and classes, while control group learners did not. At the end of the term, the same questionnaire was given to the students to know if playing games had a significant impact on their education. In addition, the teachers were asked to answer a online survey to investigate their attitudes toward playing games in language classes. The results showed that most of the teachers in this study believe that games have a positive influence on the students' attitudes towards learning English and that using them in class serves many educational purposes. In addition, games played a significant role in improving the EFL leaners' willingness to communicate. In the light of these findings, the researchers suggested using games as energizers and practical activities at the end of class not only to improve enthusiasm for learning, but also to improve the learners' language skills.

INTRODUCTION

Lack of motivation and inspiration, using old traditional methods of teaching and learning, being discouraged by their tutors and instructors, and having a fear of not learning English fluently in short period of time are some of the fundamental difficulties in learning to speak English correctly and fluently. Not having enough self-confidence in learners - especially in younger ones - bring more problems in this area. To overcome this problem, some teachers believe that games, specifically integrating ones into the teaching process, could elevate students' desire and willingness to learn more and communicate in classrooms in all levels and from different interests.

As a matter of fact, learners want fun, active and interesting activities to get motivated to learn more. Research in this subject has showed various advantages of using games into language teaching: games emphasize the meaning in language learning, thus, learners will remember better the language they learnt (Tuan and Doan, 2010); games enable children to develop physically, socially and emotionally as well as being enjoyable and fun, either as a competition or cooperation with clearly defined goals and rules (Read, 2007); and games provide a fun and comfortable environment in which learners are more motivated to take risks in language practice (Wright et al., 2006).

Although various studies have been conducted covering this topic this research was done in order to find out whether playing educational games based on the learners' levels can play a significant role in encouraging them to communicate instead of using old, boring, and traditional methods in English lessons. The study aims to find out whether games can trigger students' willingness to learn by playing games in class and try to relieve associated learning problems. The fundamental function of games is to intensify human experiences in ways that are relatively safe. The theory of games might be called the math of cooperation and competition. Situations are examined in terms of gains and losses of opposing players. They are applied in various aspects of life and different areas of study such as economics, mathematics, science, and language. McFarlane et al. (2002) agreed with Sim City (2002) in the respect that they all showed the importance of cooperative games, competitive games, and communication games as one of the most important ways to teach efficiently in a language class.

This study aims to find out the efficiency of using games in teaching English and their role in advancing students' attitudes towards learning English. Moreover, it aims to discover how useful and practical educational games can be in promoting EFL learners to communicate in class and break the ice from the teachers' perspective. In addition, it aims to know teachers' attitudes towards using games in the classroom.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does using games have a significant effect on Uzbek EFL learners' education?

RQ2: What is Uzbek EFL teachers' attitude in regard to using games in increasing students' WTC?

This paper will first discuss the results of pre and post experiment tests, several questionnaire based research results.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper was prepared according to the procedure used by Mahmoud and Tanni (2012).

To test our primary hypothesis that playing educational games is not effective in improving student's knowledge we conducted a test with 20 questions which mostly consist of vocabulary questions and a few grammar tests

The purpose of this study is to use games to promote EFL learners' willingness to communicate in an Uzbek context. The study focuses on the roles that games play in children's classrooms to know if playing educational games can lead the students to be more active and motivated to communicate more in class. Moreover, this research helps to find out EFL teacher's attitudes towards using games as a means of improving student's language skills

The design was a mixed method approach based on questionaries and pre and post tests. This study was conducted at 48th school which is situated in Davlatobod district of Namangan region, Uzbekistan. This experiment was done among 4th and 5th grade intermediate level students during the English lesson.

The major advantage of using games in learning classroom is that they promote s communicative competence while providing a meaningful context for language use. In addition to this, games provide motivation to both learners and teacher.

In this experiment 35 students of 4th and 5th grade were randomly chosen from 48th school. They were both male and female students between 10 and 12 years old. In order to have homogenous participants first testing was run and 20 intermediate students were chosen and devided into control and experimental groups with 10 participants. The other participants of the study were 12 English teachers (6 females and 6 males) teaching in that school. In carrying out this research, 3 different instruments were applied. They were pre and post-tests, survey monkey results from English teachers and ten educational games. The first 2 instruments were applied in all classes, but games were only used in the experimental group.

The first step in this process was to choose 20 intermediate level students among 35 students of 4th and 5th grade students by testing their level. Then, the students were randomly divided into two groups of 10 learners functioning as experimental and control groups. The students in the experimental group received games in their language lessons, while control group learners did not. Ten educational games were selected by the researcher to be played in the experimental group in order to investigate their role on learners' improvement in his language skills. At the end of the term, the same questions were given to the students to know if playing games had a significant impact on their education. In addition, the teachers were asked to answer a questionnaire to investigate their attitudes toward playing games in language classes. The questionnaire had 4 questions. In order to have fast and accurate results, paper based tests were given to students. To collect teacher's answers survey monkey was used as it is very convinient way of collecting data. During the period of this research

it was witnessed that although the majority of the students like to have games in their English language classes, there were a few students who did not want to participate during such activities. When asked the reason why, the answer was because of their shy character and psychological conditions (such as autism)

In this paper the pre and post test data was analyzed, then scheduled in a table wich shows the percentage of increased skills after the experiment.

Survey was known as a second statistics for the analysis. Then, results of reply by the participants was collected.
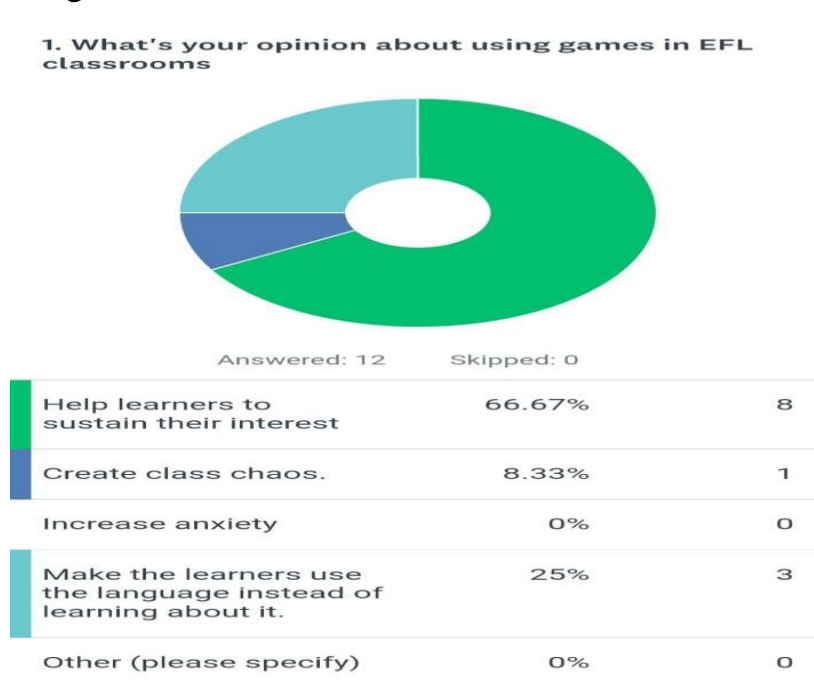
Step 3*Justify data processing/ analysis

These frameworks were chosen because it accounts for as one of the effective, common, understandable and easy type of collecting data.

RESULTS

In the course of this research, the students in the experimental group played games on various topics for 1 month, while in the second control group, the lessons were continued in the traditional way.

In course of this research, the students in the experimental group played games on various topics for a month while in the second, control, group the lessons were continued in the trqditional way. At the end of the month, the results of the pre-experiment and post-experiment tests were converted into a table and compared. Teachers' answers in Survey Monkey were used to collect teachers' opinions about the role of games in English classes.

1. What's your opinion about using games in EFL classrooms

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

Help learners to sustain their interest	66.67%	8
Create class chaos.	8.33%	1
Increase anxiety	0%	0
Make the learners use the language instead of learning about it.	25%	3
Other (please specify)	0%	0

Students	Experiment group		Control group	
	Pre expreriment	Post experiment	Pre expreriment	Post experiment
S1	43	55	51	58
S2	54	73	49	58
S3	58	75	54	60
S4	54	80	57	59
S5	52	85	52	60
S6	60	74	58	62
S7	49	75	54	68
S8	48	80	55	54
S9	56	80	55	58
S10	54	86	43	67
S11	57	78	54	64
S12	52	83	58	62
S13	45	90	54	59
S14	45	75	52	65
S15	65	78	60	67
S16	68	89	49	62
S17	54	90	54	63
S18	55	90	57	64
S19	55	85	52	68
S20	58	86	45	60

Table 1

As it is clear from the first table, the improvements of the experiment group is noticeably higher than the other, control group which proves effectiveness of using games in EFL classrooms.

In this question they were asked about their opinion about using games in the classroom 12 teachers of the 48th school more than 50 percent of them answered that it helps to sustain student's interest in the lessons and only 1 teacher answered that games create chaos in the classroom.

2. In which part of the lesson is it better to integrate games

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

	At the beginning as an ice breaker activity	8.33%	1
	In the middle of the lesson when students start to loose their focus	41.67%	5
	At the end of the lesson in order to consolidate the topic	16.67%	2
	It does not matter so much if you organize it properly	33.33%	4
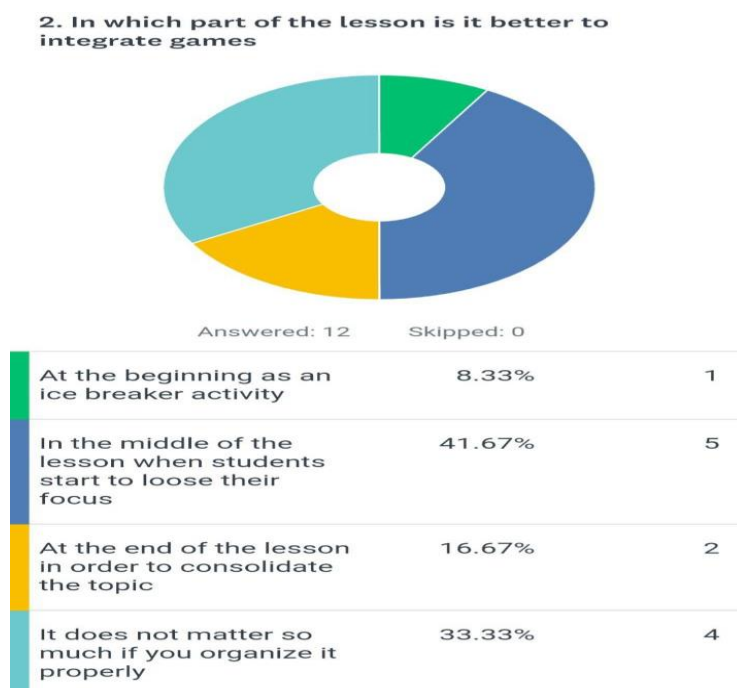
To the following question 5 teachers answered that its best to play games in the middle of the lesson, while 4 of them answered that it does not matter as long as the game organized properly.

3. How much time should be spend for games in 45 minute lesson

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

Not more than 5 minutes	16.67%	2
10 minutes is pretty enough	41.67%	5
Sometimes you can organize the whole lesson only with games	41.67%	5

When asked about how much time should be spend to the games in the lesson the dominant opinions were that 10 minutes were enough to organize a successful game in your classroom, the other one is that you can use games during the whole lesson

4. What are the major problems with using games in the classroom

Answered: 12   Skipped: 0

When students aren't putting effort into learning during games!	25%	3
When students don't play the games as intended!	8.33%	1
I don't have the extra money to buy engaging games for the classroom.	16.67%	2
When their noise becomes too loud and it disturbs other classes	50%	6

To the question about the biggest problem that emerges while using games in EFL classroom 50 percent of teachers answered that the uncontrollable noise which during the game can disturb other groups and become an issue.

The above-mentioned results revealed that using games has a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' language skills. Playing educational games in the experimental group has demonstrated that the educational games can really increase Uzbek leaners' willingness to communicate and motivate them to talk more in class and share their information and experiences more. On the other hand, not playing educational games in the control group and teaching those without any treatment revealed that their willingness to study foreign language did not really improve. Therefore, by playing games in EFL classes, leaners can get more enthusiastic to talk and have discussions in class. Discussion

Although nowadays most teachers try to take advantage of new and encouraging methods in their English classrooms, it seems the implication of such methods has been overlooked in Uzbekistan. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this study to investigate the effect of playing games on Uzbek learners' willingness to communicate. To tackle the above problems the following research questions were addressed. One of the goals of this study is to answer the first research question: "does using games have a significant effect on Uzbek EFL learners' language skills?"

This question was followed by the hypothesis that using games does not have a significant effect on Uzbek EFL learners' WTC.

Considering the first research question, the results of the present study show that playing games in classes can have a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' willingness to improve their English. According to Andrea (2011), games played a major role in achieving meaningful learning where the most motivating and productive learning experiences are taking place. This is in line with the findings of this study.

These findings indicate that games are very good at promoting students' attitude towards learning English. They also reveal that by th help of games, learners learn the target language appropriately and enthusiastically. In addition, it increases their willingness to communicate when the topic of the lesson is interesting. Moreover, the results reveal that games are not just for fun, but also allow students to ask the teacher questions in class. On the contrary, students believe that if they play games in classes, they do not dislike their classmates and they do not participate in pair activities in class. They also claim that they are not willing to talk when the teacher plays games.

In the current study, educational games are considered as important teaching tools that have not received enough attention in EFL classes. If the teachers play more games in classes, their students' willingness to communicate will increase, which makes them

more successful students. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and using games has a significant effect on Uzbek EFL learners' WTC.

Another goal of the current study is to investigate the second research question: What is Uzbek EFL teachers' attitudes in regard to using games in increasing students' WTC?

A unique finding of this study can be summed up in a short sentence "applying and choosing a game is a challenging task as it requires planning and effort as well as preparation; it amuses learners in students- centered classes.". Another finding is that games can help learners sustain interest and amuse all students in class. It received the highest level of importance. These findings were in line with Mahmoud and Tanni (2012).

Teachers believed that games amuse learners, help shy learners to participate, promote whole class participation, waste one's time, enable learners to acquire new experiences, and have more student-centered classes. On the other hand, playing games does not increase anxiety; in this case the mean was significantly lower In a nutshell, teachers believed that playing games increases Iranian learners' willingness to communicate in the class and even out of the classroom, which is similar to de Freitas (2006) who claimed that games and simulations are very powerful and excellent tools that support collaborative learning skills.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study demonstrate that games are effective as can serve as energizers and educational tools that can provide enjoyment, pleasure, passionate involvement, structure, and motivation among other benefits; the researchers supported the trend towards using them as short warm-ups.

When learning exercises are held with games, instruction is assisted, and increases foreign languages students' achievement. Moreover, if English language is practiced with the help of games, the achievement of the learners can be higher than that from traditional techniques. This is a strong invitation for teachers to refer to games while teaching difficult tasks so as to maintain an interesting teaching environment.

The overall results of this study reflect the fact it does not matter what games are played we can never deny the importance of games. If students learn with games, have fun, and feel happy and free, it means that you have reached your goals. Games strengthen language skills, in addition to allowing learners to develop social skills and good relationships while they interact with each other.

Based on all of the information above it isclear that games can and should be used as a teaching method when teaching languages. One reason why games work well as a teaching method is because of the change that has occurred in teaching, where students have become much more active in the learning process. Besides, giving students a

chance to be more active, games usually place the teacher in a background role, and therefore allow the students to take on more and more responsibility.

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