

The reasons of using games for learning



In recent years, English language has been paid more and more attention in Vietnam because its significance has been recognized in many aspects of life. The study of English is now obligatory in most schools, usually starting from sixth grade. However, Vietnamese parents, who want to equip their children with adequate knowledge of English as it may contribute to their success in the future, often have their children exposed to English language since their early ages. Among all necessary aspects of English language, grammar is often regarded as one of the most crucial part for the proper use of English. In order to communicate efficiently in English, learners should have sufficient grammar knowledge base (McKay, 1987). Nevertheless, it is stated in Nedomová's thesis (2007) that many teachers find it difficult to explain theoretical concepts of grammar to their young students. Therefore, the teachers should find an appropriate and effective tool to teach grammar to young learners. Using games in teaching English grammar is one recommended tool because games provide an enjoyable and relaxed learning environment for young students and help them to be more creative and communicative (Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011). Hence, this research was initiated with the concern of whether games should be used in teaching English grammar to young learners. The purpose of this research is to investigate the extent of effectiveness of using games in English grammar teaching for children. The research will take a look at (1) the reasons of using games as a teaching method for young learners; (2) advantages of using games in language teaching and (3) the application of games in teaching English grammar.

The Reasons of Using Games as a Teaching Method for Young Learners

Nedomová (2007) assumes that children have their own ways of thinking and learning, which are entirely different from the ways in which adults think and learn. There is no doubt that children are less experienced than adults and their cognitive ability of abstract concepts has not been fully developed. However, they have some certain characteristics which make them learn more effectively than adults do if teachers use games to teach them English grammar.

First of all, children are creative. They are not only creative with grammatical forms but concepts as well (Halliwell, 1992). Lightbown and Spada (1999) present an example in their book to illustrate the creation of children as follows:

Kyo: I'm hungry.

Dad: We'll have some poppy seed bread in a little while.

Kyo: No. I want it now.

Dad: We have to wait 'til it's defrosted.

Kyo: But I like it frossed. (p. 13)

The child in the example recognizes the prefix “ de-” as negating the root word, so his version of the opposite of “ defrosted” comes out as “ frossed”. It seems that children have the ability to communicate in spite of their relatively limited vocabulary. Therefore, games can be rather useful and

important because they may maximize the use of vocabulary and grammar of children. Games help children to be creative in the language they learn, which naturally leads to the development of their communicative skills.

Another characteristic is that children have the capacity of indirect learning. They can learn without being aware of it. Young learners tend to remember the peripheral things happening around the class better than what they are supposed to learn. One typical lesson often lasts for 40-45 minutes, however, most children can only fully concentrate for 10-20 minutes before they start to get bored and tired. Therefore, games can be utilized as an appropriate method to encourage children's aptitude for indirect learning. (Nedomová, 2007). For example, teachers may use the method of "guessing" to teach new phrases and structures. Young learners will focus on find the right answer rather than what phrases and structures needed to be learned. However, teachers can be satisfied because they notice that students can actually use the grammatical items without difficulties.

Last but not least, children love talking. This is considered as the most important characteristic of children to which teachers must pay attention (Halliwell, 1992). As we can see, one of the most common problems in the classroom is that the students often talk to each other during our lessons. However, it can be a powerful motivator if teachers know how to cope with this situation. Teachers should choose appropriate activities to take advantage of this problem. For example, teachers can organize information gap activities in which the students have to talk to each other to find the necessary information; or encourage them to tell a story by having them one by one take turns to make up a story. By doing this, children can develop not

<https://assignbuster.com/the-reasons-of-using-games-for-learning/>

only their communicative skills but also the ability to use phrases and grammatical structures correctly.

Based on those above mentioned characteristics, it can be concluded that using games is a suitable method for teacher to help young learners know the rules of English language without having to use complicated grammatical terminology, which are very difficult for children to understand.

The Advantages of Using Games in Teaching English Grammar

It is undeniable that games may bring a number of advantages in teaching English grammar to young learners.

The first advantage is that games can increase students' interest and motivation. In a typical grammar lesson, teachers just follow the tasks given in the book and students have to complete the tasks in writing and reading. Students may sometimes be frustrating because of a serious and hard-digesting grammar lesson. However, if teachers know how to use games to teach grammar, learners may actually learn while they are playing and they are willing to learn more. Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971) believe that “ the main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses” (pp. 28-29).

Learners' interaction may increase as games are often organized in pair work or group work. According to Rinvoluci and Davis (1995), games are excellent for promoting cooperation and mutual help within students. The students

must be engaged in the game and communicate more with their teammates so that they can beat other teams and become the winner. Tuan and Doan (2010) state that students may be more willing to ask questions, to discuss and think creatively about how to use English to achieve the goal. Therefore, the competition in games gives student a natural opportunity to work together and communicate in English with each other a lot.

Another benefit of games is that games promote active learning process of students. During a game, learners often have to make resolutions or decisions. It is stated in Yu's thesis (2005) that evaluation, discussion, reflection, and application all occur during playing games and all promote learning. Games allow the students to have active control of the learning process and also promote prompt feedback from their peers (Allery, 2004). Through active learning process, students can retain grammar rules for a long time as according to Holler (as cited in Yu, 2005), using games in grammar teaching is a valuable tool for stimulating learning. He states that we remember only 10% of what we read, 20% of what we say, but 90% of what we do. Therefore, games provide more opportunities for students to practice in a meaningful linguistic situation. This contributes to greater retention of grammar rules and better learning results.

The Application of Games in Teaching English Grammar

It is obvious that using games in teaching English grammar can be an effective way to help young learners acquire necessary knowledge. In the other hand, it is quite challenging because teaching grammar through games also require great effort from the teachers.

Some students may think that games are simply for fun. However, teachers should not share the same thoughts and consider games as a “time filler” that does not have any linguistic purpose. Teachers should select some games that have both entertaining and education goals at the same time. In order to find out such those games, these following questions which have been proposed by Hong (2002) should be thought about:

What specific grammar items are the teacher introducing or practicing with this game?

What type of game is it and what is its purpose?

Is the game too hard or too easy for students? Should it be modified to match students' level?

To what extend do the students participate in the game?

Do the students like it? Does the teacher like it?

She also gives some recommendation to teachers about using games in teaching English grammar to young learners by claiming that:

First language may be used when explaining the game's rules to beginners because it is easier for them to understand. When students are at a higher level, teachers may speak more English in the class.

Teacher should demonstrate the games rather give diffuse instruction.

Games should be as short as possible because young learners are able to pay their attention to the games just for a limited time.

It is observed by Uberman (1998) that most teachers use games as a warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of the lesson as a “time filler”. However, Lee (1979, p3) propose that “ games should not be regarded as a marginal activity, filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do”. Teachers should bear in mind that games can be used at any suitable time during the lesson and they should not be treated as a merely warm-up activity. Rinvolucris (1990) proposes that teachers can use games as a part of grammatical instruction in any of these three stages:

before presenting a given structure, especially to find out diagnostically how much knowledge is already known by the learners;

after a grammar presentation to see how much the group have grasped;

as a revision of a grammar area (p. 3).

There are a wide range of language games for teachers to choose from. They should know the purpose of the game; either it focuses on accuracy, such as use the verb in the correct form or on successful exchange of information and ideas. Teachers may select any of these games in the classification of Hadfield (1999) as follows:

Sorting, ordering or arranging games

Information gap games

Guessing games

Search games

<https://assignbuster.com/the-reasons-of-using-games-for-learning/>

Matching games

Labeling games

Exchanging games

Board games

Role play games

In addition to all these, it is suggested by McCallum (as cited in Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011) that there are many other factors which should be taken into consideration when teachers select a game to teach young learners such as the size and the physical properties of the classroom, the equipment, materials and the time available for a game. All of these may contribute to the success of the game.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this paper has presented a review of using games as a method to teach English grammar to young learners including the reasons of using games as a teaching method for young learners; advantages of using games in language teaching and the application of games in teaching English grammar. It can be concluded that using games in English grammar teaching is an effective way to help young learners know more about the language rules and are able to use them correctly. However, this paper has reviewed only the impacts of using games on teaching grammar. Further studies about the use of games in teaching other aspects of English such as vocabulary and communicative skills are still in need.