

GAMES IN TEACHING CHILDREN GRAMMAR

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Abstract

Nowadays Teaching English to Young Learners has become a trend. In every school, English is taught as one of the main subjects. Teaching young learners is different from teaching adults, children have their own way of learning. Since children like to play and have fun, the learning and teaching process should be suited with the nature of the children themselves. One of the forms of fun activities for children is through games. This study explored the effectiveness of games in improving students' grammar competence in expressing degree of comparison and to find out students' attitudes toward games. This study used a qualitative and quantitative approach employing one group pretest-posttest design of experimental research and open questionnaire for the data collection. The instrument of this study was a general test of English proficiency, a pretest, and a posttest. The general test was a standard and validated test based on the book "Games for Children" by Gordon Lewis and Gunther Bedson (1999). Twenty multiple-choice items were selected from the book. One part was considered as the pretest, and the other one as the posttest. The results from the quantitative data showed that there was significant difference in the performance of the students after they received treatment with 95% degree of reliability. Meanwhile, the result from the qualitative data showed that fun learning with games was perceived by the students positively. They expressed their frank opinion that learning English through games was fun. They felt happy when the lesson was delivered in a fun way since it could lower their anxiety. The results revealed that the language games used in this study were found to be effective in promoting learning of the comparative degree. Testing the selected before carrying it out in actual teaching was advisable. This was to enable the teacher to make necessary changes to ensure the smooth flow of the games.

Key Words : *TEYL, Games, Grammar, Learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

In response to the impact of globalization, the teaching of English to Young Learner (TEYL) has undergone expansion across the world in the last two-three decades. The governments increasingly lower the starting age for English as they often discover that secondary and tertiary level students lack proficiency levels in English required for operating in a global world. So the perceived importance of English is beginning to have a significant impact on policy decisions, increasingly from pre-primary upwards, which has huge implications for teachers, students and resources. In Indonesian context, English is taught even before the children enter the playgroup, there is a special class for children who are still around two or three years old. This is supported by the fact that the optimum age for children to learn a foreign language is when they are still in a very young age. This phenomenon has made Teaching English to Young Learners, TEYL, become increasingly famous.

The definition of Young Learners is children between the ages of about 5 years old to 12 years old (Rixon, 1999) in Yuliana (2003), while according to Lynne Cameron; young learners are those under 14 years old. Moreover, the definition of young learners is mainly based on the years spent in the primary or elementary stages of formal education before the transition to secondary school. That is why the ages of the young learners could be varied from one country to the others.

Young children learn differently from older children, adolescent and adults (Harmer, 2008; 82) and this fact has some impacts on the teaching methods and strategies used to teach them. "Children learn through play" is a sentence that has guided early childhood educators for decades. The nature of children is that they like to play and have fun than studying. Isenberg also stated that play is a need of every child and it is an important childhood activity that helps children master all developmental needs (1993). Play is the work of childhood and is important for learning and development. One

of the forms of play that children are familiar is games. Games are fun and games not only engage the children, but also teach through play – and most of the time the children don't even know they are learning until the time comes to show their knowledge. It truly is possible (and almost necessary) to create a classroom where the students not only learn but also truly enjoy their time there. Incorporating games into the classroom can build interest in the class, put language in an interesting and meaningful context, give students a break from the pressures of learning a new language while giving the break a purpose, teach real world skills and, most importantly, build the student/teacher bond.

To incorporate games and activities while introducing a topic to a classroom can be very motivating as they arouse interest and concentrate attention while giving the illusion that one is merely playing games. These activities, if appropriately chosen, can be used to practice all the language skills; the productive skills i.e. speaking and writing, and the receptive skills – listening and reading. The teaching English grammar can be hard going - for the teacher and the students, however. It can be very difficult or painful. Fun learning games are believed to be helpful to overcome the difficulties in teaching grammar. Considering the possibility of games as suitable technique in improving students' capability in grammar, the researcher conducted the research by applying games to improve the students' grammar competence, particularly the grammar competence in stating comparison. The main purpose of this study is to find out the effectiveness of games in improving students' grammar competence in expressing degree of comparison and to find out students' attitudes toward games. In order to accomplish the objectives of the study, the two research questions are addressed:

1. To what extent do games effective in improving children's mastery in grammar particularly in comparative degree?
2. What are the students' attitudes toward the games?

The Teaching of Grammar in TEYL

Young learner classrooms are inevitably affected by the trends that sweep through foreign language teaching, as can be seen from the development of 'task-based' syllabus in Malaysia, of the 'target oriented' curriculum in Hong Kong, and of 'communicative syllabuses in many other countries. Some of these trends turn out to be good for learners and learning others are less clearly beneficial. Young learner contexts also starts trends, but less frequently; Prabhu's work on task-based learning language teaching, for example.

Grammar teaching in recent years has been as susceptible as the other aspects of FLT to trends, the most significant of which for our purposes has probably been the swing away from grammar-translation methods through communicative methods and on to current ideas about 'focusing on form'. Each of these perspectives on language teaching takes a different view of learning processes, and we can clarify what is important about each by examining practice through the lens of research on learning.

Young learners need to be surrounded by and participate in meaningful discourse in the foreign language, and it would not be conceptually appropriate for grammar to be explicitly taught as formal, explicit rules in young learner classrooms to children under the age of 8 or 9 years. It is suggested that it is important for teachers to have awareness of grammar issues, and to have a range of form-focusing techniques, so that they can take advantage of learning opportunities that arise when learners need grammar to take their language learning forwards and can bring grammatical features of stories, dialogues, songs, etc. as children get older, so they can increasingly able to learn from ore formal instruction, but it should be remembered that grammar teaching can destroy motivation and puzzle children rather than enlighten them. Good learning centered grammar teaching will be meaningful and interesting, require active participation from learners, and will work with how children learn and what they are capable of learning (Cameron, 2003).

Teaching Grammar with Games

Teaching English grammar can be hard going - for the teacher and the students. It doesn't have to be difficult or painful, however. English grammar can be taught using fun learning games and before teachers know it students will be more than willing. there has been a movement away from the traditional methods of teaching English grammar through writing, rewriting and worksheets to using a more active approach through games. Researchers have also begun to look at how and why these new methods work.

Four sound reasons to teach grammar with games

1. Arif Saricoban and Esen Metin, authors of "Songs, Verse and Games for Teaching Grammar" explain how and why games work for teaching grammar in an ESL classroom. They say, "Games and problem-solving activities, which are task-based and have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, are the examples of the most preferable communicative activities."

- They go on to explain that grammar games help children not only gain knowledge but be able to apply and use that learning.
2. Additionally, games have the advantage of allowing the students to "practice and internalise vocabulary, grammar and structures extensively." They can do this because students are often more motivated to play games than they are to do desk work. Plus, during the game, the students are focused on the activity and end up absorbing the language subconsciously. One can also add that fun learning games usually contain repetition, which allows the language to stick.
 3. While games are motivating for the students, probably the best reason, according to Saricoban and Metin, to use games is that "the use of such activities both increases the cooperation and competition in the classroom." One can use games to add excitement through competition or games which create bonding among students and teacher.
 4. Aydan Ersoz, author of "Six Games for the ESL/EFL Classroom" also explains more reasons why games do work for teaching grammar. Learning a language requires constant effort and that can be tiring. Ersoz says games can counter this as because:
 - * Games that are amusing and challenging are highly motivating.
 - * Games allow meaningful use of the language in context.

The theory of intrinsic motivation also gives some insight as to why teaching grammar through games actually works. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal factors that encourage us to do something. Most young learners will not internally decide that they want to learn grammar. They don't yet understand the concepts of why it's important to know proper grammar, so these external factors won't affect them much either. Instead, intrinsic motivation can lead encourage them to play games. If these games are good then they will be learning while they are playing.

Using some movement is crucial because movement helps activate the students' mental capacities and stimulate neural networks, thus promoting learning and retention. If you have a large class with no space you still have options. Children can stand up, sit down, move various body parts and pass things around to each other. Movement does not only mean children tearing around the playground. When teachers are looking for games to use in their classroom, it is suggested not just to pick something to be a "time filler" which does not have a definite linguistic outcome. These games may entertain the students, but when teachers don't have

much time with them each day as it is, It is likely games do double duty to get the most out of the time teachers spend playing games. It is also suggested to have a clear linguistic outcome for each game. The game can be a listening game to allow the students to repeatedly hear a new grammatical structure in use, or it can be a speaking game to allow practise of the grammar once it has been absorbed through listening beforehand. There are degrees of difficulty with speaking games from basic repetition in a fun context to more creative sentence creation for revision or more advanced practise once the basics have been mastered. The teacher should lead the children through this progression so that the game at hand is always well within the grasp of the students. This makes games fun rather than laborious. It is a mistake to play a speaking game immediately after the new grammar has been presented. Ideally reading, spelling and writing games come after the new grammar has been absorbed and the students can use it orally. Another thing to watch out for with grammar games is that a maximum of students are involved simultaneously. If there are thirty children, a game where only one child is speaking at a time should be avoided. On the other end of the scale however are games that cause chaos in class and make teachers unpopular with colleagues because of high noise levels.

2. METHODS

To be able to understand the phenomenon under studied wholly, there two techniques applied in this study. To answer the first research question, the experimental design is employed since this study tries to establish possible cause and effect between and dependent variables (Cresswell, 2008). The one group pretest-posttest design of experimental research was used in this study.

Since this study also tried to explore students' attitude towards games, so an open questionnaire was given to the students to answer the second research questions. A descriptive qualitative approach is used to interpret the findings in a descriptive way.

The subjects of this research are twenty students of the sixth grade of SDN Neglasari 2 Coblong, Sekeloa, Bandung. The choosing of these subjects was based on a consideration that learning English through games had never been used by the English teachers in that school with the reason that it would be a waste of time to employ game in the classroom.

The instrument of this study was a general test of English proficiency, a pretest, and a posttest. The general test was a standard and vali-

dated test based on the book "Games for Children" by Gordon Lewis and Gunther Bedson (1999). The aim of this test was to find out the improvement of students' grammar. The pretest was a grammar test prepared by the researcher. Twenty multiple-choice items were selected from the book. One part was considered as the pretest, and the other one as the posttest. The aim of the posttest was to reveal the efficacy of treatments provided to the groups during the treatment.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

After collecting the data, a statistical procedure was utilized to analyze the data. In this study, paired sample t-test was used to get the comprehensive answer to the first research question. The data obtained from the open questions were classified and transcribed to get the clear picture of the students' attitude towards the games.

The Pretest-Posttest Scores

After doing the statistical computation, the result of the pretest-posttest scores is as follow; Pretest-posttest Data Using Statistics Product Service Solution (SPSS) 15.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	68.50	20	14.244	3.185
	Posttest	83.00	20	13.803	3.086

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pretest & Posttest	20	.426	.061

Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-14.500	15.034	3.362	-21.531 -7.469	-4.311	19	.000

Table 1 above presents the descriptive statistics of pretest-posttest score of the group. The output Paired Sample Statistics shows that the mean score of the group before the treatment is 68.50, the standard deviation is 14.24, and the standard error means is 3.18. After having the treatment, the mean score of the group was 83.00, the standard deviation is 13.80, and the standard error mean is 3.08. The data shows that there was a significant improvement of the group after being taught with the technique chosen.

The output data of Paired Sample Correlation shows that the correlation score before the

treatment and after the treatment is $r = 0.426$ with the $p = 0.061$. This data illustrate that the correlation of the score before the treatment and after the treatment significantly strong since the r value is close to 1 and it is significant at the degree of trust of 95% since $p > 0.05$.

To test whether there is significant difference of the mean score before and after the treatment, we can refer back to the hypothesis set to find out the difference of mean scores.

Ho: There is no significant difference between mean scores after and before the treatment.

Ha: There is significant difference between mean scores after and before the treatment.

To determine whether there is significant difference between two mean scores, the premise used is as follows : if $p > 0.05$, then Ho is accepted or the sample means is the same, on the other hand, if $p < 0.05$, then Ho is rejected or the two sample means is not the same.

The data above shows that the t value is -4.313, with $p = 0,000$. Since $p < 0,05$, so Ho is rejected or the sample mean is not the same.

It can be concluded that there is significant different in the performance of the students after they received treatment with the reliability is 95%. It means that games indeed can improve the students' ability in mastering English grammar.

Students' attitude toward games in language learning

To answer the research question, the researcher asked the students to complete the questionnaire. There were five questions they should answer. These include whether or not they like an English lesson, whether or not the teacher's explanation is clear, whether or not they like learning English through game, whether or not learning English through game is fun, and whether or not games are useful for learning English.

Having analyzed the students' answers on each multiple choices questions, it could be assumed that not all the students like English lesson. This is mainly due to their difficulty in participating in the classroom and the way they perceived about English.

Concerning with the teacher's explanation in the classroom, most students states that the way teacher explains the lesson in the classroom is clear (80%), and some students states that teacher's explanation is sometimes clear (15%). Only few students states that the teacher does not explain lesson clearly.

Incorporating games in the English lesson brings beneficial effect to the students. The data shows that most students put forward their favor

in games (95%) and few students says that they sometimes like learning English through games, no student puts objection of using games in learning English.



Figure 1. The following is the result of the questionnaire distributed to the students

Fun learning with games is perceived by the students positively. They express their frank opinion that learning English through games is fun. They feel happy when the lesson is delivered in a fun way since it can lower their anxiety. The students state that games are useful in helping them learning English (90%).

4. CONCLUSION

From the research done, it was found that language games have positive effects on the teaching and learning of grammar, particularly on comparative degree. It was noticed that the students were more responsive and participated actively. During the games sessions the subject appeared to be highly motivated in their efforts to outdo each other. It was observed that the students were laughing and excited during the games activities. When the students enjoy what they are learning, there is a great possibility that what has been learnt will be more readily remembered. It was noticed too, the students were more responsive and participate since the class was more towards student-oriented. The student interaction in a game classroom was better because the whole lesson is focused on the students. Besides that, games provided students with the best opportunity to use the language creatively. This is true because certain language games required them to be imaginative and creative. They believed that they learnt the language subconsciously while playing the game. Therefore it can be postulated that the improvement of the subject may be obviously due to the treatment that they had undergone. This reveals that the language games used in this study were found to be effective in promoting learning of the comparative degree.

From this study, the researcher feels that it is advisable for the selected games to be tested before carrying it out in actual teaching. This is to enable the teacher to make necessary changes to ensure the smooth flow of the games.

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