DO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS NEED GAMES?

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Abstract: Games are generally associated with children or teens in language learning. One of the reasons why games are given is because children and teenagers have short concentration span. Therefore, inserting games in the teaching and learning process is a wise way to maintain their interest and to make them focus on the topic learned. Read (2007) argues that games provides stimulation, variety, interest and motivation. Cross (1992) also emphasizes that games reduce tension by adding fun and humor to lessons and they add an element of competitiveness that motivates students to participate. On the other hand, teaching English in university seems far from fun. This may be because students have to deal with loads of grammar-based materials and cope with many different reading topics presented in a less interesting way. Teachers tend to play their role as lectures instead of modifying different kinds of roles as proposed by Harmer (2007). Moreover, students are obliged to achieve certain level of English competence set by the institution as a requirement for study completion. Thus, this paper will discuss 1) to what extent games are applicable in university classes, 2) what kinds of games suitable for them and their steps, 3) students’ responses to games in English teaching and learning.

Keywords: games, learning, and responses

Introduction

Mastering English is inevitable in order to be able to compete in this global world. Therefore, learning English is compulsory for Indonesian students. Previously, English was formally taught from Elementary level of Education. A new regulation on the English language learning for Elementary School had been published. It states that English is a lesson taught as an extracurricular. It can be said that students formally learn English from secondary to tertiary level of education.

Having experience teaching English both in formal and non formal settings, the writer unearthed that there is different way of teaching English between formal and non formal education settings- in schools and English courses. The teaching of English in formal settings, for instance, in schools and universities tends to be formal; teachers explain the topic, the grammar focus, and the vocabulary. After all done, then the students generally do relevant exercises and practice the skills taught. This might be because teachers must accomplish the materials taught for one semester so that they have to make sure that students learn all the material and by the end of the learning students can achieve or go over the minimum required score set by the school.

Similarly, the teaching of English in tertiary level is also conducted more or less the same, specifically, in the institution where the writer teaches. Students have to accomplish six credit semester of English subject which are divided into three series, namely, General English, Academic English, and English Proficiency. The objective of this series is that by the end of the series, students should reach score of English proficiency of ≥450 (equivalent to TOEFL) which has been set by the university as the quality target for its graduates’ English competence. Consequently, teachers and students have to work hard in order to attain the target. Lots of English materials supporting students to deal with different types of test problems, such as listening, structure or grammar and reading comprehension are prepared in the syllabus. Students are also given opportunity to do adequate exercises in the hope that they can perform well during the final test.

With massive theories and practices, then it can be foretold that the teaching and learning may be predictable, monotonous and less interesting. The class will start with teachers’ explanation then followed by exercises. Students are exposed to rigorous explanation, practices and tests. Therefore, inserting games in the class activity may be worth trying to make the teaching and learning more interesting and students feel more comfortable in learning.

Theoretical Reviews

There are some important elements needed in making the teaching and learning to take place successfully. Among others are the teacher, the students, the techniques, and the materials (Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2007). Good integration of the aforementioned elements may realize a better learning outcome.

Teachers play an important role in the teaching and learning process. In the classroom, teachers should be able to adopt a variety of roles. Harmer (2007) proposes five roles of teachers in language teaching, controller; teachers are in charge of the class and of the activity taking place and are often and , prompter; is when teachers are involved in a role play activity, participant; is the traditional picture of teachers during student
discussions, role plays or group decision making activities, resource; when students ask question about things they want to know or understand, and tutor; the combination of the roles of prompter and tutor. Similarly, Brown (2001) identifies possible roles of a teacher are among others, as authority figure, leader, knower, director, manager, counselor, guide, and even as friend, and parent.

Students, according to Brown (2001) are categorized into two namely their age and proficiency levels. On the other hand, Harmer (2007) give more categorization, they are: learners age, learners differences, language levels and motivation. Teaching children is different from teaching adults because they are of different characteristics of learning. Teaching students of different proficiency levels are more challenging than teaching students within similar proficiency levels. Teaching students with different motivation needs certain treatment, particularly students with low motivation.

Students in university come from different categories, in terms of proficiency levels, styles of learning, and motivation although they are of approximately similar age. Therefore, it is not simple to make the teaching and learning is acceptable to all students in class. For example, in the institution where I teach, the objective the teaching and learning of English is students are able to achieve certain proficiency level of English which is measured by what is called English Proficiency Test EPT. In our university it is ≥450 of EPT score for all majors but ≥475 for English department students. Surely, to achieve the goal there should be good integration between the teacher and the students.

There are tremendous numbers of techniques in teaching English. Cited in Brown (2001) following are the proofs. First, Elizabeth Clare (1988) outlined 167 activities for teaching children ESL in her book entitled ESL Teacher’s Activities Kit. Another, Friederike Klippel (1986) described 123 communicative fluency exercises. Third, Shoemaker and Shoemaker (1991) brought 78 interactive techniques. Those are just the few from the long list. He simplified those techniques into:
1. From manipulation into communication, for instance, choral repetition, and cued substitution drill, while communication refers to completely open-ended and unpredictable responses. The activities among others are storytelling, brainstorming, role plays, certain games, etc.
2. Mechanical, meaningful and communicative drills, drills are commonly done chorally of simple repetition drills, substitution drills, or even moving slot substitution drills.
3. Controlled to free techniques, these techniques are a continuum from controlled, which slightly similar to manipulative, to opportunity for students to explore themselves with the language.

According to Brown (2001) techniques deal with the manner of how teacher involve the use of materials, namely textbooks, pictures, charts, realia, and technological aids. The most common form materials used in language teaching is textbooks. However, it is the responsibility of the teachers to deliver the topics in the textbook in such a way so students can find it friendly and easy to learn. The textbooks used will be dependent upon the needs of the students, the aim of the learning outcome, or the skills expected to master by the students by the end of the learning process. The final learning outcome may determine the techniques of the teaching and learning.

**Games in language Teaching**

Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines games as activities that people do to have fun. Haycraft (1978) identifies that games are an agreeable way of getting a class to use its initiative in English. Similarly, Hadfield (1990) cited in Deesri (2002) describes games as an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun.

Games have been used in language teaching for several reasons. Read (2007) argues that games provides stimulation, variety, interest and motivation. Cross (1992) emphasizes that games reduce tension by adding fun and humor to lessons and they add an element of competitiveness that motivates students to participate. It can be concluded that games are fun. Fun in learning is important because it may raise students’ interest in the learning. Games are generally conducted in groups so they may help students build friend relationship and at the same time raise students’ competitiveness. They facilitate students to know and collaborate with members of the class because they may be grouped with different students in different activities. Having better relationship among members of the class may lead to comfortable learning atmosphere.

Games can lessen anxiety toward English. Crookal (1990) states that games are students focused activities which require active involvement of learners. Therefore, learners are given bigger portion of responsibilities. Games are able to bring real-life situation to the confinement of the classroom with allows learners with an opportunity to use the language Celce Murcia (1979).

Aside from that McCallum (1980) elaborates that there are numerous advantages of games for instance:
1. Focus students’ attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items,
2. Can function as reinforcement, review and enrichment,
3. Involve equal participation from both slow and fast learners,
4. Can be adjusted to suit the individual age and language levels of the students.
5. Contribute to an atmosphere of healthy competition, providing an outlet for the creative use of natural language in a non-stressful situation.

6. Can be used in any language teaching situations and with all skill areas, like (reading, writing, speaking or listening).

7. Provide immediate feedback for the teacher, and

8. Ensure maximum student participation for a minimum of teacher preparation.

It can be concluded that games provide lots of benefits in language teaching. They can make the teaching and learning interesting, arise students’ motivation, lessen anxiety and applicable for different range of age.

**Methods of Research**

This research was conducted last semester to sophomore students of Accountancy of Widyatama University, Bandung. Students got six credits semester of English subject. The objective of learning English is that students were able to achieve the minimum score of English proficiency ≥450. Therefore the content of the materials covered structure, listening and reading comprehension. As a result, students got little opportunity to practice their spoken English. The lecture was given some in English and some in Bahasa Indonesia. This was aimed at giving better understanding toward the lesson learned.

The participants in this research were thirty two students with twelve male and twenty female students. Their language proficiency ranged from elementary to intermediate level. But most of them were of elementary to pre-intermediate level of English proficiency. This research employed a descriptive method. The data were collected through a) classroom observation, b) interview and c) response journals. This research tried to unearth the following questions: 1) to what extent games are applicable in university classes, 2) what kinds of games suitable for them and the steps, 3) students’ responses to games in English teaching and learning.

**Findings and Discussions**

To figure out research question 1) to what extent games are applicable in university classes, the writer found that most of the students responded that games can be used in class. Their responses were consistent. This can be identified from classroom observation during the game was employed in the class, from their responses during the interview and from their written answers in the response journals. From classroom observation, the writer noticed that during the game all students actively involved. Although the writer spotted some students were shy at the beginning but along the way they could adapt and enjoyed the activity. The games were conducted in group of five and each member of the group would get the turn to represent the group doing speaking activity. Thus, games are applicable in higher education setting.

Since they are adult learners, the writer tried to find appropriate games for the students were “words guessing” and “quick and smart game”. The objective of words guessing is to exercise students speaking ability especially in giving definition and explanation, while “the objective of “quick and smart game” is to practice their listening skill and test their general knowledge. From the classroom observation, interview and response journal the writer found the answer for research question 2) what kinds of games suitable for them and the steps. Most of the students found those two games practiced in the class were suitable for them. They stated that the games were fun, not childish yet challenged their speaking skill which they rarely practiced in class.

The steps of doing “words guessing game” were first the teacher prepared words to guess on pieces of paper, generally the parts of speech was noun. Then the cards were rolled then put them in a jar or a can. Next, taking in turn, representative of the group picked the rolled card then tried to explain the words to the group. Giving gestures were not allowed. If the group could guess the words, they got score. If they cannot guessed it the card would be given to the next group, and so on. On the other hand, “quick and smart game” took a little bit more preparation. Teacher had to list down questions about general knowledge or even questions related to school subjects, such as, history, sport, geography, etc. The class was divided into groups. The groups would have to answer as many questions as possible. The group that answered the most would get the highest score and became the winner of the game.

All respondents found the game were suitable for them. They stated that the games were fun, challenging and gave them opportunity to expand their general knowledge and recall their secondary schools subjects. Few of the respondents wrote that the questions were hard. Therefore, it can be concluded that in general students found the games were suitable for them in terms the content and the fun. However, more than half of the students thought that games were suitable for time filler rather than a technique for material learning.

Students’ responses to the games given in the class were positives. This was proven by their engagement observed during the activity. They also found the games were enjoyable and fun. They gave them opportunity to mingle with other members of the class. They also stated that games gave them opportunity to practice their comprehension and speaking skill.
Conclusions

The answer to question stated in the title, whether university students need games, is yes, they do. However, there are points to consider when giving games to them. First, the games should be suitable with them. This means they should be relevant with their age, proficiency level of the student. Secondly, games are served as time filler instead of techniques in teaching certain language points.

Bibliography


