

Teaching English as a Foreign Language through Games: University Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract: The main purpose of this research paper was to explore teachers' perceptions on using language games in teaching English as a foreign language. The study was performed at the University of Sciences and Technology, Aden, Yemen. The sample of the study was 16 teachers of English. The main instrument employed in this research was a questionnaire. The results showed that all teachers of English have positive perceptions towards using games in teaching language. In addition, the results showed that language games can be boring and time wasting. Moreover, controlling the classroom was one of the most difficulties that face teachers of English during playing games in the classroom.

Keywords: Games, Advantages, Disadvantages.

Introduction: Generally, in teaching and learning any language in the world, teachers use different techniques to introduce the language to the learners. They use these techniques to motivate their students to learn and to be active in the classroom.

Particularly, in teaching English language as a foreign language, teachers of English use many techniques that make language teaching easier and funny. One of these techniques is called language games. According to Hadfield (1990), there are many types of language games such as information gap, search, matching, exchanging, collecting, combining, arranging and card games, board games, problems and puzzles, role plays, games of picture, psychology games, sounds games, story games, word games, true/false games, memory games, question and answer games and guessing games.

The language games are considered as one of the most important techniques that are used in teaching and learning process currently. The purpose of using the language games is to practice a certain language skill and provide the learners with a lot of advantages in the classroom. Many experienced writers emphasized that games are valuable. For example, Constantinescu (2012) stated that games improve the learners' understanding of written and spoken English and help them to learn words and structures in a context using correct pronunciation and spelling.

Statement of the Problem: Some teachers of English still use old traditional methods in teaching. These methods reduce of students' motivation and make them feel bored in the classroom. Therefore, this study presents language game as a new method to teach English as a foreign language. In addition, it identifies the advantages, disadvantages and difficulties of using language games in the classroom while using the language games in the process of teaching.

Objectives of the Study: This study aims to:

1. Explore whether teachers of English use language games in teaching English in the classroom or not.
2. Find out the advantages and disadvantages of using language games in teaching English in the classroom
3. Find out difficulties of using language games in teaching English in the classroom.

Questions of the Study

1. Do teachers of English use language games in teaching English in the classroom or not?
2. What are advantages and disadvantages of using language games in teaching English as a foreign language in the classroom?
3. What are the difficulties facing teachers of English of using language games in the classroom?

Scope and Limitation of the Study: This study focuses on the use of language games in teaching English language in the classes. Some teachers of English who teach English language as university requirements in all the departments of Engineering and Computing Collage at the University of Science and Technology in the academic year 2024-2025 targeted to participate in this study

Literature Review:

Definitions of Games: There are several definitions of the concept “game” by many scholars. These definitions are written in different ways but they have the same meaning. In this study, the researcher presents some of them. For instance, Hadfield, (1990) defined games as “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun” (p.1).

On the other hand, Harmer (1991) stated games are as:

A vital part of a teacher’s equipment, not only for language practice they provide, but also for the therapeutic effect they have. They can be used at any stage of a class to provide an amusing and challenging respite from other classroom activity and are especially useful at the end of a long day to send students away feeling cheerful about their English class. (p.101)

In addition to the above definitions, Richards and Schmidt (2010) explained game as an activity that is organized and it usually has a specific task, a group of rules, competition among players and how the learners speak and write the language together.

Classification of Games: There are several classifications of games that can be employed in a contemporary EFL learning environment. Therefore, games cannot be classified into categories because such categories often overlap. Many scholars classified language games into different ways, for example, Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2006) classified games into eight types: (1) Care and Share (2) Do: move, mime, draw, obey: (3) Identify, discriminate, Guess, Specula, (4) Describe, (5) Connect, Compare, match, group, (6), Order (7), Remember and (8) Create (pp.4-5). Another classification of language game is provided by Hadfield (1998). She classified games into two classifications. In the first classification, she divided games into two types: linguistic and communicative games. Linguistic games focus on accuracy, such as supplying the correct antonym. Communicative games presuppose successful exchange of information and ideas. In the second classification, she agreed with Pham (2007) in the number of games types, she divided them into nine categories that usually includes both linguistic and communicative aspects. She named them as (1) sorting, ordering, or arranging, (2) information gap games, (3) guessing, (4) search games, (5) matching games, (6) labeling, (7) exchanging games; (8) board, (9) role play games.

Pham (2007) classified game into nine types as Hadfield (1998). They are as follows: (1) structure games which provide experience of the use of particular patterns of syntax in communication (2) Vocabulary games in which the learners ‘attention is focused mainly on words. (3) Spelling games (4) Pronunciation games (5) Number games (6) Listen-and-do games (7) Games and writing (8) Miming and role play (9) Discussion games.

Advantages of Using Games: Games have many advantages when they are used in classroom. They motivate the learners to learn the language when they are in a game and have fun without noticing that they are learning the target language. Moreover, they make the learners feel stressful moments clear. Crookal (1990) claimed that learners feel stressful because they think that they have to master the target language that is unknown to them. Besides, learners become too anxious about being criticized and punished by their teachers when they make a mistake. Games are advantageous at this point because they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence because learners do not afraid of punishment or criticism while practicing the target language freely (p.112). The other advantage of game, it brings real-life situations to the confinement of the classroom which provides learners with an opportunity to use the language. In addition to these advantages, Kim (1995), mentioned some advantages of games. They are as follows: They are motivating and challenging.

- Learning a language requires a great deal of effort.

- Games help students make and sustain the effort.
- Games provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading.
- They encourage students to interact and communicate.
- They create a meaningful context for language use.
- Games bring real world context into the classroom, and increase students' use of English in a flexible, meaningful and communicative way.
- Games usually involve friendly competition and they keep students interested in learning the language.
- Games can help them (students) learn and hang on to new words more easily.

Therefore, using games in teaching has many advantages for both teachers and students. They provide motivation, challenge and active participation for the learners in the learning process. They can forget that they are studying because they are learning in a playful context. Indeed, games also involve them in the group learning and provide an extra practice without creating boredom.

Disadvantage of Using Games: In spite of all the advantages, some experts said that using games in English teaching is time consuming since they are just a technique for fun. In addition, they are not productive due to the generation of anxiety which makes children nervous and even depressed, because they are afraid of losing games or being blamed by partners for their performance. Stojkovic and Jerotijevic (cited in Gozuc and Caganaga, 2016) mentioned four disadvantages of using game. They are as follows: (1) discipline issues, learners may get excessively noisy (2) straying away from the basic purpose of the game-play activity, perhaps, due to inadequate rules instruction, resulting in playing too much and the lack of learning (3) If games are already familiar or boring, students may not get equally involved (4) some learners, especially teenagers, may find games unnecessary and childish. Besides these disadvantages' games are tiring and boring.

Challenges in Applying Language Games: From the disadvantages above, some of English teachers face difficulties in playing games in the classroom. Scott and Ytreberg (2001) mentioned two different disturbances; external and internal disturbance. The external disturbance means noises produced when game starts and this causes disturbing for students. On the other hand, internal disturbance happens when the student is not interring in playing particular games and makes others to be distracted. Moreover, teachers sometimes cannot control the class because the learners are more overactive during a particular part of the lesson. In addition to these challenges, there are other challenges face teachers of English when using games in the class room such as, lack of finding suitable material for playing games, the management of time is not really good because of unprepared material and technical problem, and some students who were really lack of motivation often did not participate in the games, especially when the games were done in groups.

Time Limitation of Using Games in the Classrooms: Before using any game in the classroom, the teacher should give attention to the main elements. Identifying time is considered as one of them that should be taken in teacher's consideration. It is known that games are mostly used as warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of the lesson to keep students quiet. Uberman (1998) supported this idea by saying that games were often used as short warm-up activities or when there was some time left at the end of a lesson. On the other hand, Lee (1979) proposed that that games should be at the heart of the language learning process instead of being an activity which is just used when the teacher and students have nothing better to do. With this in mind, games should be put into the center of classroom teaching and they should not be treated as a merely warm-up activity. Hadfield (1990) had same idea, she stated that games should be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they were suitable and carefully chosen.

Based on the opinions above, it can be concluded that games should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moment but they are used as short warm-up activities or when there was some time left at the end of the lesson, at the heart of the lesson or at any stage of the lesson.

Choosing Appropriate Games: There is a great number of language games, so the teacher should be very careful about choosing the appropriate game that links the abilities of students and their previous knowledge.

Choosing games depends on the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings. Cook (2000) suggested four elements that are necessary for the games to be played. They are: (1) The arrangement of the classroom and the time duration of the game. (2) The classroom organization in groups or working individually. (3) The rules of the game and the game's character, which can be cooperative or competitive. (4) The role of the educator and the participation of the young learners (p.184). According to Constantinescu (2012), a good language game should be focused on some main steps:

- Games should have an aim. They are used to motivate students, not only for fun.
- Games should focus on the use of language. By their means students have to learn, practice, or refresh language components.
- The content should be appropriate. It should fit the curriculum, be correct from all points of view and not to promote wrong values (e.g. violence).
- Games should be technically easy to use in the classroom.
- Games should be in accordance with students' age and level of knowledge.
- Games should keep all of the students interested.
- It is advisable to use short games; otherwise students may lose their interest.

From the above, it can be concluded that the teacher should select the appropriate game according to the time and students' level.

Methodology: This section introduces the sample of the study, instrument of the study (teachers' questionnaire) and description and results of the questionnaire.

Sample of the Study: The sample of the study was (16) teachers of English language of University of Science and Technology, Aden, Yemen. This study carried out in the second semester of the academic year 2024 - 2025. All of the participants taught courses of English language I and II as a required subject in which games are used actively in the classroom.

Instrument of the Study: In this current study, the researcher used a questionnaire as an instrument to collect data from the participants. The questionnaire was distributed to 16 teachers of English in the University of Sciences and Technology. It is composed of 7 questions to obtain participants' perceptions about the use of games in teaching English as a foreign language.

Description and Results of the Teachers' Questionnaire

1. As a teacher of English, do you use language games in English teaching process?

This question aims to explore whether the teacher uses game in the classroom. The results revealed that the teachers of English used language games in teaching English language because they think language games play a helpful role in teaching process and give students opportunities to improve their skills.

2. How often do you use language games in teaching English?

This question aims to know if the teacher uses language game in the classroom frequently. According to the teachers' responses, it seems that four participants always use language games in the classroom. Seven of them sometimes use this technique. They use the same category of games because they do not know how to play the games effectively and five of them use the language games rarely in teaching English affirmed that they do not have any knowledge and skills with language games.

3. Are language games an effective method in teaching English?

This item inquiries about the language game if they are effective or not. The results showed that the majority of the teachers (13) had the same idea that language games are considered as an effective method used in teaching English while three of them had different idea by saying that language games are not effective method if the students do not understand them.

4. What do you think about language games?

This question aims to know participants' opinions about the language games. The results appeared three different answers were suggested for this question based on perspectives of the sample of the study. The majority of the participants (eight) think that language games are a teaching method. Three participants think

that language games are a motivating method and same number of them think that language games are an entertaining method. Two participants thought that language games are boring.

5. According to your experience, what are the advantages of using language games?

This question aims to identify the advantages of using games in the classroom during teaching process. The results summarized some advantages, they are: 1) motivating shy students to participate with active students in the classroom, 2) helping students to be more active, 3) giving students many opportunities to play and communicate the language, 4) helping teachers to present the lesson smoothly, 5) reducing students' anxiety and 6) helping students to remember things faster and better.

6. According to your experience, what are the disadvantages of using language games?

This question aims to identify the disadvantages of using games in the classroom during teaching process. Participants' responses listed some disadvantages such as wasting of time, making noise in the classroom and reducing of teacher's role in the classroom.

7. What difficulties do you face when teaching English through games?

The last question of this questionnaire explores difficulties that face teachers when they use games in teaching English in the classroom. The results revealed that the teachers of English face difficulties during teaching process. These difficulties were represented in lack of time, there are not suitable materials for playing games, some teachers of English do not have enough information about language games, and large number of students in the classroom in which some classes had more than 80 students. In addition, the games themselves make the students less-focus to the materials because they do not attract the student's attention. Another difficulty is a lack of sufficient materials such as cards, rim paper, colored pencils, etc...

Recommendations: Based on the results of the study, this paper listed some recommendations to the teachers of English.

- The teachers should use language games in the classroom as much as possible at any stages of the lesson.
- The teachers should choose the appropriate games according to the students' level.
- The teachers should introduce language games in an easy way in order to be understood to the students.
- The teachers should determine the appropriate time before using language games in the classroom.

Conclusion: This study has examined teachers' perceptions on using language games in the classroom. The results revealed that language games had many advantages for both teachers and students. In contrast, they had disadvantages that caused some problems to the teachers of English when they played games inside the classroom. Based on teachers' responses to the questionnaire, it can be concluded that language games were used as a teaching, motivating and entertaining method to teach English as a foreign language. In spite of, the disadvantages and difficulties of using games, the teachers of English had positive perceptions towards language games.

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تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من خلال الألعاب: وجهات نظر مدرسي الجامعات

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المخلص: كان الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الورقة البحثية هو معرفة وجهة نظر المدرسين حول استخدام الألعاب اللغوية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وقد أجريت الدراسة في جامعة العلوم والتكنولوجيا في عدن، اليمن. تكونت عينة الدراسة من 16 مدرساً للغة الإنجليزية. وكانت الأداة الرئيسية المستخدمة في هذا البحث هي الاستبانة. أظهرت النتائج أن جميع مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية لديهم وجهات نظر إيجابية تجاه استخدام الألعاب في تدريس اللغة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أظهرت النتائج أن الألعاب اللغوية قد تكون ممتعة ومضيعة للوقت. إضافة إلى ذلك، كان إدارة الصف الدراسي أحد أبرز الصعوبات التي يواجهها مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية أثناء استخدام الألعاب في الفصل الدراسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الألعاب، الايجابيات، السلبيات.