



ENHANCING STUDENTS' GRAMMAR BY USING GAMES: A PRACTICAL CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Why teach students English grammar with games? Research is showing that this is an excellent way to do it. What kind of games work best? This article answers those questions and is written/or those teaching English as a second language to students.

Key words: English games, classroom, language

There are many ways to teach ESL/ TEFL to the students but one of the exciting and rewarding ways to do it is by using language (English) games. (Language) Games not only engage the students, but also teach through play and most of the time the students 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 English 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 word skills and, most importantly, build the student/ teacher bond.

While many of us might not like to admit it, many students don't necessarily like the idea of being in our classes to learn a new language. Even more, as teachers we all know that even the most attentive students can get bored and lose focus on occasion. Incorporating English games is a great way to get out of the rut of language drills, worksheets, boring repetition and individual study. If you can find ways to

keep the students interested in class (i.e. through fun English games), they will also find that they are interested in the topic - and will often absorb and retain more knowledge than if they are simply studying to pass a test or complete an assignment.

Games make teaching lively and vigour. While having language practice to a great extent, the students have fun and joy out of the language games. Thus, language teaching has been made more of a pleasure, than boredom. These games are for a class, a group, and even for an individual. These can be used in vocabulary, spelling, sentence structures and pronunciation.

Games in the language classroom help to involve learners actively in the learning process. They provide a challenge, which encourages learners to stretch themselves (in order to win). Most games in involve learners in practicing the language they have studied and in trying to use it meaningfully. It also helps learners to forget they are studying. They lose themselves in the fun of the game and the activity motivates them. Language games encourage collaborative learning. Team games require pooling of knowledge; pair games require co-operation and turn taking. Students can learn from one another. A good reader with a proficient speaker can combine



skills to make a winning team. Besides this, it provides variety of pace. Games can be short, long and can involve writing, speaking, listening or reading. They are excellent for motivating students whose attention is wandering. Lastly, language games give extra practice without inducing boredom. Many games involve repetition of the same language over and over again. In normal circumstances this would look artificial and be demonstrating.

Repetition is necessary for fluency, yet there is nothing more meaningless than repetition in a void. If you ask your class to keep repeating words back at you they'll start feeling like parrots. Also, if you want the students to practice conversation you have a few options. The problem with most options is that the class is either practicing this real life usage in small groups that don't have you there to observe and offer assistance or much of the class is left to work on their own while you have a conversation with one or two pupils at a time. English games solve this because they allow you to engage the entire class in activities that require practical use. When students learning ESL get this meaningful and contextual practice, the language becomes more vivid in their minds and they are better able to remember what they've learned and used.

Before starting the language games we need to know how to manage the games in the classroom. Some tips of game management are given below:

Management of Games:

◆ **The rules have to be as clear as possible.** Complicated scoring and long lists of rules can draw the focus of the lesson away from using language games.

Stick to basic card games, keep to one topic for a game or try and adapt local games to which everyone knows the rules.

Don't explain the game -demonstrate it. Always have a trial run before starting the game proper and you play a team member in the rehearsal.

Don't let games drag on too long.

Set time limits for answering questions (e. g. buzzer, a bell, a whistle or a slow count down from five when time is up - these theatrical bits also make the game fun for all learners).

*** Try to use games where there is more than one winner.**

Everyone then feels they stand a chance of winning and is more willing to try. Games must seem achievable in order to appeal to learners.

***Assess the learning value of a game.** Some games might be fun to play but are all the students involved? Are they all using language or hearing language again?

***Consider very carefully the language needed to play the game.** What will the students have to say to each other to guess a person's card? Try the game with a friend or play it through in your head. Does it activate the language you want to practice? Have students got the necessary vocabulary to play it successfully?

***Balance the types of games you use.** Vary whole class games with card games in pairs, noisy team games, and concentration games for calming down an over-excited class.

***Don't overuse games.** Games are a motivator but lose their challenge and interest if they become an everyday



routine. They need to be seen as a special moment.

Keeping in mind the management of games following language games can be implemented in the language classrooms:

Listen and Act: Some physical activity is given here. Assume these postures or movements.

*Stand up, sit down, run, stop, skip, hop, jump, walk, listen, fall in line, stand face to face, hands up, bend forward, now backward, sideways, rest.

*Teacher: Come here, stop, sit down, stand up, run, jump, hop, walk, skip, make a line, turn to your left, to right, rest.

*The teacher must demonstrate these movements himself/ herself. If possible some musical rhymes will very much help the movements. Young students will enjoy moving to music. When some pupils get used to these commands, later on having a practice, and finally acting as models, may take the place of the teacher.

*Teacher: Sunil, jump please; Avtar, walk please; Rajiv, run please; Gauri skip please.

*Let more confident students now give simple commands to the class, or to a small group.

*The class can be divided into two or three groups. They can be made to sit in two-three columns. They can now be made to play '*relay games*' in turns. The teacher gives the commands like '*run*', '*hop*', '*jump*', '*skip*'. One student performs and gives the end of his line and takes a seat there. The pupil before him now takes his turn, and so on..... These *relay games* are of many more types.

This being language class pupils learn the language through games. They can also learn language by singing, dancing, painting, reading, making toys, cutting paper, hanging pictures, arranging displays, cleaning and dusting, sending and receiving things/ objects/messages, drawing as best as they can. They may also be called the situational use of language.

Dialogues, songs, rhymes and slogans can also be used in language learning-cum-games.

Guessing Games:

♦ **Guess the Picture:** The teacher possesses a set of Flash Cards with pictures of clothes, food, activities and places. He/she selects one card, and without showing it to the students, asks them to guess what it is. The pupils guess one by one.

Teacher: Guess how I went to market?

Pupil -1: Did you go by car?

Pupil -2: Did you go by bus?

Pupil -3: Did you walk?

Like this pupils go on asking about various possibilities, till at last they are able to guess the right object.

♦ **Guess the sentence:** Here the teacher has to write down a sentence on a sheet of paper. He/ she writes the structure or pattern of the same on the blackboard, e. g. *J went (where) to (do something)*. Now guess it. Pupils must guess the extra sentence by asking questions, e. g.

Pupil-1 : Did you go to the fair?

Teacher : No.

Pupil-2 : Did you go to the playground?

Teacher : No.

Pupil-3 : Did you go to the library?



Teacher : Yes.

Pupil : (Guessing correctly) "I went to the library to return the book."

Riddle: The teacher gives a few hints about an article or an individual and then asks the students to make a guess. For example, he says, "I am a source of all knowledge. I am having some other brothers also. I remain locked-up. I am very costly. But I am useful. What is my name?" The answer is an *encyclopedia*. Students can be encouraged to make their own riddles in this game.

Oral Composition Games:

□ **Story Telling:** The teacher starts the story by giving the first sentence. He explains that each one of them has to take a turn, and add a new sentence. The story begins like this:

Teacher: One day an old woman, while coming back from the field, after working there, felt very tired.

Student-1: She felt very thirsty, but there was no water, to be found.

Student-2: A boy saw the old woman and asked if she wanted water... etc.

A student acts as secretary, and records all that is said. When the last sentence is also said and recorded, the student secretary reads the story before the whole class.

◆ **Question and Answer:** The teacher shows a picture from his *conversational wall pictures*, and makes two teams (Team-A & Team-B) of students. One will be asking *questions*, the other will give *answers*. He/she tells them that he would ask them to talk about some *call words*. One team will ask *questions*, the other will give *answers*, on these call words. He/she starts, by mentioning call words from the pictures shown.

Teacher: Birds.

Team-A: Are these birds flying to their nests?

Team-B: No. They are flying towards fields, where grain is being harvested.

Team-A: How can you say that?

Team-B: The sun is rising in the sky, behind the fields*etc.*

◆ **Picture Memory:** The teacher brings some pictures, which the pupils have not seen earlier. He/ she show the pictures only for a short while, one by one. Then he/ she asks questions on them. He/ she make two teams, and they answer by turns. The team answering more questions wins.

◆ More Questions More Marks:

The class is divided into two groups of six pupils each. The teacher writes down an imaginative sentence on the class board, "*It was a good journey*", and asks the groups, to think of any number of questions, and dictate them to the class secretary say within a time limit of 15 minutes. The group with a bigger number of correct questions is the winner.

Card games:

◆ **Alphabet Cards:** students may be asked to prepare alphabet cards. After these are ready, these may be mixed up. Then the students can be asked to make their own names, out of these cards. After the names, the teacher may ask them to arrange the cards forming a few words: places, fruits, bird's food, persons, etc.

• **Address Card:** Every learner should make his/her address card. Address cards of the school, railway station, market, temple, post office, etc. can also be made. Then they are asked to mix



them up. After mixing, find out your address card, etc...

♦ **Name Cards:** (i) Let every child make a name card. Collect all of them. Now ask them to pick out the names of their friends from the bunch. This activity will encourage reading and fixation of alphabets in their minds. This is '*Read the Name Game*'. The same game may also be played a bit separately like, (ii) one child is asked to pick up 4-5 cards and place each one in front of the particular pupil, whose name is in it. The game is '*Who is who?*'

In the same way activities like, *Labeling, Map-Making, Flash-cards, Pictures and Labels (Matching), Preparing Folders, Albums, Charts, Maps*, etc. can also be tried in the class, as well as in Projects or Assignments, to be taken up by either the individual learners or their groups. These are some language games or activities.

Teaching English grammar can be hard going - for teachers and the students. It doesn't have to be difficult or

painful, however. You can teach English grammar using fun learning games and before you know it your students will be more than willing. How it works, you ask. Well, 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.

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