

The Importance of using games in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This essay seeks to understand the value and use of games in EFL instruction. This study used semi-structured interviews and observation, two distinct types of qualitative research methodologies. This research employs multi-method triangulation throughout. Data collection methods included audio-recorded interviews and observation. It is a case study where two undergraduate students are taught English using an altered version of the game Twister. From the results, it was concluded that games should be used in second language learning settings to provide a pleasant, motivating, and productive learning environment for EFL students.

Keywords: games, Twister, vocabulary, EFL classrooms

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I. Introduction

One of the most crucial elements of EFL courses are games. They contain enjoyable activities with objectives and regulations. Games are "an activity with rules, an aim, and an element of enjoyment," according to Hadfield (1990; cited in Deesri, 2002, p.1).

Language games, according to some writers, should be in the core of the foreign language education program rather than being relegated to the program's periphery because, in addition to being entertaining, they also have objectives and are governed by rules (Haldfield, 1999). According to S. M. Silvers, the author of the book *Games for the Classroom and English Speaking Club*, games are often seen as time fillers by instructors since they break up repetitive repetitions in the class (Silvers 1992). He contends that many professors often overlook the reality that true learning may often occur in a relaxed setting and that students can also utilize the target language they have already been exposed to and have mastered. According to Greenall's definition, games encourage healthy rivalry among students who are engaged in language-related activities (Greenall, 1990).

The fact that students gain a lot from playing games shows that employing them in a foreign language classroom is acceptable. Numerous seasoned authors have confirmed the educational value of gaming. Lee (Lee, 1995) lists a few causes, including the following: Games provide an opportunity to break up the irregular routine, but they are crucial for providing challenges and inspiration. Additionally, games motivate learners to connect and communicate effectively, provide them a reason to persist in their learning efforts, give them a context in which to use the language meaningfully, reduce anxiety, and let them study in a fun and relaxed environment.

For both language instructors and students, games offer various benefits. When students participate in the activities and have fun without realizing it, they encourage learning the target language. In addition, it is exciting for the instructor to offer the language in a fun environment, which strengthens the work. The statement "games inherently promote student attention, a correctly presented game may be one of the greatest motivating tactics" from McCallum (1980, p. ix) stresses this idea. Making difficult situations obvious is another benefit of employing games in a foreign language environment. A stress-free environment should be provided for language learners. As a result of the lack of fear experienced by learners at this time and their increased positive emotions and self-confidence as a result of not being concerned about being penalized or reprimanded when speaking the language freely, games are now highly beneficial (Crookal, 1990). This essay aims to demonstrate the value of games in EFL courses. The function of games in EFL courses will be thoroughly examined in the section that follows.

II. Literature Review

One of the most crucial elements of EFL courses are games. They contain enjoyable activities with objectives and regulations. Games are described as "an activity with rules, an aim, and an element of enjoyment" by Hadfield (1990; cited in Deesri, 2002).

Games that teach foreign languages may be used as a framework to provide language learning a

purposeful setting. According to Constantinescu (2012), playing games may help students get a better knowledge of both spoken and written English. Games aid in the context-based learning of words and grammatical structures utilizing proper pronunciation and spelling.

Despite the fact that the majority of instructors are unaware of games as a learning approach, they play a significant role in language learning classes. However, it provides a number of advantages for learners' learning processes. First off, games save the lecture from becoming routine and uninteresting. On the other hand, they foster a productive and encouraging learning atmosphere where the emphasis is on the students and their education.

Games always make learning enjoyable for students, which is why they are more engaging than regular sessions. The activities in the classroom assist the students learn the language while having fun. Even reserved and reticent kids respond favorably to them (Mei & Yu-Jing, 2000). Children are more motivated as a result because they play as a substitute activity, which motivates pupils to maintain interest in the lesson and keep working. They lessen the pressure of learning a foreign language in this manner (Mei & Yu-jing, 2000).

Games have several benefits for encouraging the acquisition of the target language in EFL courses. As games are used, students' concern over language acquisition lessens, which is one of the benefits linked with them. In language lessons, students make the assumption that they must succeed in the target language, even when they do not. Additionally, students experience a great deal of anxiety as a result of their instructor criticizing and punishing them when they make a mistake. Games now take center stage because they let learners practice the target language without fear of punishment or condemnation, which lowers anxiety, boosts pleasant emotions, and boosts self-confidence (Crookall, 1990).

Games are referred to be learner-centered activities since learners actively participate in them. As stated by Crookall (1990). Through games, roles between students and teachers are altered, and teachers urge students to actively engage in their learning. Games thus allow students an opportunity to be in charge of their own education. Another benefit of games from an educational standpoint is that they provide a framework for language usage that is relevant. Teachers may create a variety of situations via the use of games that enable students to learn subconsciously since they are not focused on the message or the language. As a consequence, when they concentrate on a game as an activity, they pick up the target language in the same way they pick up their native tongue: unconsciously (Cross, 2000).

According to Constantinescu (2012), games provide the following benefits:

- "Games expand kids' vocabulary in English in a familiar and relaxed setting (even for pupils who may have special needs), where they feel secure. English is also widely utilized with computers, in addition to this.
- Playing video games fosters motivation and a drive for personal growth.
- The elements of challenge and competitiveness are essential to any game, and pupils focus more intently on finishing the assignment.
- Multidisciplinary strategy. Students also draw on information from other courses.
- Playing games helps pupils become better observers.
- The goals and rules of games are obvious.
- Playing games fosters creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking.
- Games provide fresh and engaging methods of instruction and practice that take the place of conventional workbooks.
- Games may be adjusted for players with various degrees of understanding.
- Educational games are simple to use and comprehend.
- Playing educational games in class doesn't take much time.
- Many instructional video games are available online at no cost.
- Quick feedback for both students and teachers.
- The effects are greater and more obvious (sometimes both visual and aural).
- The working hours are often agreed upon and observed from the start.

While encouraging collaborative learning, games also allow for individual student progress and cognitive development.

- Games may be utilized as incentives for pupils in the classroom.

Students could be willing to play games only for enjoyment. Teachers, meanwhile, need more arguments to persuade them to play games. When choosing games to use, when to use them, how to link them to the curriculum and textbook, and most importantly, how effective they are, teachers must exercise extreme caution. Teachers in EFL settings should use extreme caution while selecting and modifying games. According to Constantinescu (2012), instructors should take into account a number of factors while selecting language games, including:

- "Games need to have a goal. They're not only for fun; they're utilized to inspire kids.
- Language use should be emphasized in games. Students must acquire, practice, or brush up on language skills

using their resources.

- The subject matter must be suitable. It should align with the curriculum, be accurate from all angles, and not advocate for undesirable ideals (e.g. violence).

The following criteria should be met by games used in the classroom: • They should be technically simple to use; • They should be appropriate for the students' age and knowledge levels; • They should keep all of the students interested; and • It is best to use brief games; otherwise, students may lose interest.

Along with all these benefits, it's also crucial to consider the learners' motivation since they are more motivated to learn the language when they are engaged in a game. "Games inherently enhance student attention, a correctly presented game may be one of the highest motivating approaches," states McCallum (1980, p. ix) in support of this assertion. In addition, games "spur motivation" and "students are deeply immersed in the competitive features of the games; additionally, they strive harder at games than in other courses," according to Avedon (1971; cited in Deesri, 2002). Games thereby increase students' interest in classroom activities, which in turn motivates and increases their desire to study.

In addition to numerous benefits, employing games in EFL classes has certain drawbacks.

According to Stojkovic and Jerotijevic (2011), games have a number of drawbacks, including the following: disciplinary problems, rowdy students, and other difficulties

- 2) Deviating from the game's primary goal, potentially as a consequence of poor rule training, leading to excessive play and a lack of learning

- 3) If games are monotonous or already well-known, students may not be as engaged.

- 4) Some students, particularly teens, could consider games pointless and juvenile.

Teachers often like to utilize games as warm-up exercises or, if there is time, towards the conclusion of the session. The instructors utilize the activities to break up the monotony of the textbook, fill up any additional class time, and prepare students for tests. Lee (1979) argues, however, that games need to be at the center of the language learning process rather than being a stand-in activity for when the instructor and students have nothing better to do (As cited in Uberman, 1998). They have an impact on learning beyond merely making the classroom interesting for the students. They are beneficial for English language learners and helpful from an educational standpoint. Furthermore, according to Rixon (1979), games may be utilized during the whole class provided they are appropriate and well-chosen (As cited in Uberman, 1998).

In conclusion, when games are used in foreign language classes, they provide language instructors a great deal of educational value and a number of benefits. According to a review of research on language games, games are very important in many circumstances for teaching and learning foreign languages.

III. Methodology

Semi-structured interviews and observation were employed as data gathering methods in this qualitative case study. The rationale for selecting a case study is that it enables the researcher to delve more deeply into the lives of the participants and collect richer and meaningful data. The case study research technique is an empirical investigation that examines a current phenomena in its real-life context; where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not readily visible; and in which many sources of evidence are utilised. This definition is given by Yin (1984, p. 23). Many researchers (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Debreli, 2012; Silverman, 2011) contend that a qualitative study is more flexible in gathering in-depth background data since it may ask open-ended questions or pay careful attention to events and occasions on a regular basis. An in-depth examination of the participants' learning processes was necessary since the goal of the current research was to ascertain the impacts of the Twister game on students', who are not EFL students at English Preparatory Schools, vocabulary acquisition. In order to better understand and investigate students' learning processes, qualitative data gathering tools were used. Many claim that the most often utilized tools for collecting qualitative data include games, interviews, reflective reports, and observations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2012). Multi-method triangulation, according to Kopinak, is the process of "collecting data relating to the same phenomena using more than one approach, mainly to evaluate whether there is a convergence and, as a result, greater validity in study conclusions" (Kopinak, 1999). According to Kopinak, adding additional instruments would result in the provision of more granular and multi-layered information about the fact being studied.

Since the current study does not aim to generalize to larger context and is not interested in disclosing statistical data for comparisons, this is another major factor in the decision to use a qualitative research approach. It seeks to draw out a thorough image from a select group of participants, which would provide a more comprehensive picture. More details regarding the study's participants and the tools used to gather the data are provided in the sections that follow.

1.1.1. Game(Twister)

Games are tremendously beneficial in a classroom since they provide students several opportunity to learn the language. Games may be utilized as an introduction, as the lesson develops, and as a conclusion,

according to Carrier (1980, as referenced in Sánchez, Morfin & Campos, 2007), who also identifies three relevant phases in a lesson when they can be used. The lesson starts with stimulation when games are used as an introduction. At this stage, the class has already piqued the pupils' attention from the outset. Additionally, they are quite important in determining the level of pupils. Games may also be used to review a prior activity. After the lesson plan is created, games are included to stress a point that the instructor feels is important for practice or revision. To provide an exciting conclusion, games are included at the end of the class. As a result, pupils have the opportunity to exercise the material they have learned, and the instructor may determine whether or not the material has been grasped by the class. According to Sánchez, Morfin, and Campos (2007), games have a good impact at any point in the session since they allow students to enjoy themselves while still benefiting from covert language practice.

A traditional American game called twister. It comprises of a pointer-equipped guidance board. The left foot, right foot, left hand, and right hand are the four spaces on the board. Green, red, yellow, and blue circles are present in each location. The giant twister mat has six rows of circles in the colors green, red, yellow, and blue.

In the current research, "Twister," a popular gaming activity, is chosen to assess its impact on EFL primary level students' language acquisition. Twister is a game that is often played in EFL classes, although its benefits for learning have not yet been sufficiently shown via empirical research. The efficacy of the game that is being investigated in this research and employed as a tool for data collecting.

1.1.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are used in the current research due to the fact that interviews ask questions orally and gather accessible data orally (Kuale, 2006). One of the primary justifications for choosing a semi-structured interview style is that, in contrast to structured interviews, it enables the collection of more in-depth data since investigations are conducted to get more exploratory data about the questions. The in-depth comprehension of the respondents' opinions, attitudes, and emotions is the additional justification for doing semi-structured interviews. The necessity for researchers to see aspects that could not be immediately seen, such as students' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions, led to the use of interviews (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In order to learn more about participants' behaviors and activities in relation to the EFL setting under investigation, non-participant observations were also utilised (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

In this research, students were interviewed in a semi-structured interview to gain their opinions on using games to acquire English vocabulary. An interview form was created by researchers with this objective in mind. Following the conclusion of all game-related activities, interviews were held with four participants who gave their consent and were told that their identities would be kept private and that their remarks would only be used for study.

1.1.3. Observation

Methods of observation are helpful to researchers in a number of ways. According to Schmuck (1997), they provide means of regulating nonverbal emotional expression, figuring out how participants connect with one another, and monitoring how much time is spent on particular tasks. Additionally, the researchers find that participant observation is useful for verifying the definitions of terms used by interviewees, monitoring situations where informants may not be able or willing to share ideas that would be impolite or sensitive, and monitoring situations participants have reported in interviews so that they are aware of inaccurate and distorted information described in interviews which is provided by those informants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As was already indicated, this research used the observation approach. In order to compare the observed behaviors, verbal responses, and sentiments with the participant interview data, individuals were monitored for eight hours.

1.2. Participants

Since only a small number of participants are used in qualitative research designs, it was chosen to focus on only two of them in order to get a better insight. These individuals were chosen using a sampling strategy based on criteria. The following criteria were used to randomly choose individuals who met the general requirements, and these were:

They should have elementary level English ability, regardless of whether they are EFL students at English Preparatory Schools.

General characteristics of the two participants are given below:

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Education
Jack	23	Vietnamese	Private lesson
Jill	22	Vietnamese	Private lesson

1.3. Data Collection Process

In June 2022, four games of "Twister" were played in a school garden. Two hours were spent playing the game that the researcher had modified. Participants in each course were watched by the researcher for four weeks. At the conclusion of four weeks, interviews lasted over an hour. Six questions, including "Do you believe this game pushed you to acquire vocabulary?", were posed to the participants. Would you rather play this game while learning vocabulary?

1.4. Data Analysis

The transcription of the audio-recorded interview data marked the beginning of the data analysis. The familiarization of the data recorded is then accomplished by reading the transcription multiple times. The information was then assigned meaningful codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In order to gather the most relevant information under generic labels, those codes were then refined into categories. The next section presents these categories together with the data that best fits each one.

2. Findings and Discussion

Some of the categories that resulted from the data are covered in this section. As examples for the categories, a few excerpts from the interviews are also provided.

2.1. Motivating factors

2.1.1. Feeling off fun and satisfaction

The results showed that Twister's characteristics, such as color and word cards, produced enjoyment, relaxation, and contentment. The most frequent responses to the question "Do you believe this game pushed you to acquire vocabulary?" go like this: "I would want to play this game again and over again since it's so pleasant. I am more motivated, content, and willing to study while I am having fun. (Jack, interviewee)

The results of this investigation are consistent with the relevant literature. People play games, according to Bartle (2004), because they want to have "fun." In a similar vein, Gee (2007) emphasizes that hard effort and in-depth study go hand in hand with enjoyment.

This conclusion is supported by the study's literature.

2.1.2. Feeling lower anxiety and stress

When studying a second language, students must come across strange terms, which puts them under a lot of stress. They thus don't feel safe and at ease, which undoubtedly affects their capacity to study. In summary, games help people feel less anxious, more at ease, and curious. It is confirmed that they are amicable and at ease. Since students are aware of this, they may communicate naturally while playing games without worrying about making errors or editing their own statements. When students are not anxious or stressed, they may improve their speaking and fluency. Additionally, when games are played, learners' anxiety levels drop when they play a game. Additionally, students have significant levels of anxiety because they worry about being corrected and disciplined by their instructor when they make a mistake. Games enter the picture at this point because they soothe anxiety, boost pleasant emotions, and boost self-esteem. According to Crookal (1990), learners do not worry about being reprimanded or scolded as they freely use the second language. One of the players said, "While I was playing the game, I did not analyze if I made a mistake or not, I merely utilized the language to convey the idea." Another participant said, "I was not under any tension while playing the game, as I was enjoying while giving the words,"

Yltanlar and Caganaga (2015) claim that employing a game to help language learners overcome negative emotions like fear, reluctance, and anxiety by creating a flexible and welcoming learning environment for them is a kind of encouragement. One of the participants supports this claim by saying, "I did never realize whether I had made a mistake or not, as well as if my buddy would laugh at me or not. Because we are not EFL learners, it is hard for us to constantly use the language effectively, therefore I would like to let you know that the game, which was extremely entertaining and fascinating, should be used to teach a language.

2.1.3. Preventing from memorization

Although vocabulary is taught through speaking, listening, reading, and writing sessions, it is not often thought of as a separate topic that students should study. Students employ their existing vocabulary, while the instructor and their peers introduce new words that will be used in the lesson's classroom activities. When it comes to vocabulary, many English language learners believe that they just acquire a list of new terms with meanings in their native tongue without using them in actual context. When they come across unfamiliar terms, the majority of language learners may find themselves in the same predicament, searching up the words in a bilingual dictionary to determine their meanings or definitions. Without understanding how to use the new phrases in practice, they can just replicate the lines of the words. When they acquire terminology in this manner, they may realize that it is not sufficient and satisfying for them, and they may believe that this is simply due to

their inability to remember. Gnoinska (1998). It is ineffective to learn a language in this manner. According to Decarrico (2001), words shouldn't be treated as a distinct subject while being learned or remembered without understanding. The process of acquiring new words is cumulative, and when words are encountered again, they become more enriched and entrenched. Nation (2000). In conclusion, it is not believed that English language learners should acquire vocabulary by "seeing and remembering."

The study's interview and observation data made it clear that the game Twister assisted participants in picking up the language without the need for memory. Furthermore, the findings made it clear that games are helpful tools for helping learners retain the terms without consulting any textual sources. Was it simple to recall the words while playing the game? was a question that one of the players answered as follows: Yes, I had no trouble remembering the words. With your assistance and the hints provided by my pal, it was simple to recall. The most impressive thing was when I realized I could acquire language without using a dictionary by playing games.

2.2. *De-motivating Factors*

Vocabulary lessons are taught throughout the speaking, listening, reading, and writing courses, despite the fact that historically learners did not see them as a separate topic to study. The instructor and classmates provide new language that will be used in the lesson's classroom activities, and the students apply the vocabulary that they already know. When vocabulary is a concern for English language learners, many of them believe that they just acquire a list of new words with meanings in their native tongue without using them in any meaningful context. The majority of students may encounter the same scenario, which involves searching up terms in a bilingual dictionary to determine their definitions or meanings when they encounter new words. They could replicate the lines of new phrases without understanding how to use them in a practical situation. When they utilize this method, they may realize that acquiring language from a list is not sufficient and satisfying for them, and they believe this is simply due to their inability to remember, Gnoinska (1998). Learning a language in this manner is ineffective. According to Decarrico (2001), words shouldn't be treated as a distinct subject while learning or remembered in a way that prevents comprehension. To add to that, "learning new words is a cumulative process, with terms richer and established when they are encountered again," Nation (2000). In conclusion, it is not believed that vocabulary acquisition by "seeing and remembering" is a useful strategy for English language learners.

According to the study's observation and interview findings, Twister clearly assisted participants in picking up language skills without requiring them to memorize anything. Additionally, it is clear from the findings that games are helpful tools for helping students remember terms without consulting any written sources. When asked whether it was simple to recall the terms while playing the game, one of the players replied as follows: Yes, remembering the words came quite easily. It was easy to recall thanks to your assistance as well as the hints provided by my pal. The most impressive thing was when I realized I could acquire language via games without consulting a dictionary.

III. Conclusion

This study's main goal was to examine the value of incorporating games in EFL lessons. As these results demonstrate, playing games produces an enjoyable and satisfying atmosphere in addition to strong incentive for language acquisition. Additionally, the value of games in reducing language anxiety cannot be understated. Games are crucial for teaching English because they provide students a chance to practice the language while also having fun and being entertained with it. In conclusion, games are acceptable as practical and efficient teaching aids for vocabulary. Games may be used in EFL classes to make lessons more engaging, pleasant, and productive (Uberman, 1998).

As a result of the study's results, it is clear that games are crucial tools in language-learning classrooms for creating a calm atmosphere for students. Games are also highly helpful for both instructors and students if they have an instructional goal in addition to being entertaining.

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