

## USING LANGUAGE GAMES AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY IN SPEAKING CLASS

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Abstract

Pengajaran bahasa Inggris bukan hanya harus menarik melainkan juga harus menyenangkan, karena dengan begitu, pemahaman pelajar akan materi yang disampaikan pun pasti akan lebih mudah. Berkaitan dengan hal itu, pengajar bahasa Inggris seharusnya lebih kreatif dalam menciptakan atau menemukan berbagai tehnik dalam menyampaikan materinya, agar para pelajar bukan hanya mampu memahaminya, tapi juga mampu menerapkannya. Oleh karena itu, tidak salah jika para pengajar tetap mempertimbangkan tahapan-tahapan awal proses pemerolehan bahasa pertama (*first language acquisition*) pada anak. Salah satunya adalah bagaimana seorang anak memperoleh kata-kata dan ungkapan-ungkapan baru pada saat mereka sedang bermain di taman bermain (*playground*) ataupun di rumah. Sehubungan dengan hal tersebut, akan menjadi sangat bermanfaat dan penting bagi para pengajar bahasa Inggris untuk menggunakan tehnik permainan (*games*) dalam mendorong meningkatkan pemahaman dan kemampuan (*skill*) berbahasa Inggris mereka.

Kata Kunci: Games, Speaking, atmosphere

### ***I. Introduction***

English plays an important role in Indonesia as one of a foreign languages, both in written and oral communication. Until recently, English has become the only compulsory foreign language subject taught in Indonesia. Some schools start from elementary level but mostly from Junior high school to senior secondary schools and even up to graduate program level of education. Starting from 1994, English has even been taught in some elementary schools.<sup>1</sup> However, it is still treated as optional subject or local subject.

There are many facts that students cannot reach the goals in curriculum. Their speaking skill is very poor. It indicates that the English instruction in the classroom has not yet been effective. The techniques that are applied in the classroom are monotonous. After studying the situation found around and watching the teachers or lecturers taught in some institutions, I found that the techniques used in speaking, for instance, use a monotonous circle. It ranges from:

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1. Giving model, reading in pair, asking some pairs to perform in front of the class;
2. Giving situation, asking students to create dialogue by writing, revising, and then perform it in front of the class;
3. Even some dialogues are just read then students are asked to answer the questions based on the dialogue. In this case the students do not practice speaking but rather reading instead.

These ways of teaching speaking is labeled as the conventional one. Teachers or lecturers are challenged to be more creative. They should always develop their teaching competence in order to be able to deliver their lessons with varied techniques. This is particularly important for teaching English especially to young learners. One way in motivating them is by using language games as a technique to show how fun and easy English is.

It is now generally accepted that language teaching should not only be interesting but also enjoyable. This is not to assume that it is easy, yet without enjoyment, it will be even more difficult. Teachers or lecturers of English should always be creative in finding out different ways of delivering their lessons in order that the students are able to use the language they are learning. When teaching young learners of English, the teachers or lecturers should always consider how children acquire their first language. The way that they acquire their first language may be adopted in delivering the English lessons.

Children acquire language from their playground. Most of the children's language expressions in the mother tongue are picked up while they are playing. New words and new expressions are tried out while they are in the playground and in the house. This way should be created in the learning process. It is inevitable and logical that young students will speak in their mother tongue during the lesson. Teachers or lecturers must be aware that they should be encouraged to use English without pressure and tension. By using English in their lessons, especially if it is creatively designed as a learning playground, some words and expressions will be able to stick in their memory.

Therefore, it will be very useful and essential to use language games in encouraging young learners to improve their speaking ability. Thus, the language games will be more useful if they are considered as the core of teaching activities of learning speaking. For example: how to ask and give information, ask and give ideas, explain something such as occupation, describing place, and retelling sequence of events. They are not only treated as ice breaking or killing time activity.

## **II. Discussion**

### **a. Definition of Game**

What is game in this study? Games are not activities mainly aimed to break the ice between students or to kill time. Byrne gives the definition to

games as a form of play governed by rules. They should be enjoyed and fun. They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities, but a way of getting the learner to use the language in the course of the game. Similarly, Jill Hadfield defines games as “an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun.”<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, games involve many factors: rules, competition, relaxation, and learning, in particular. The main focus of using game in class is to help students learn and have fun. However, to use games in classrooms, it is equally important that before playing the rules of the games are clearly explained and well understood by the students. There should be only a few, well-explained rules. Demonstrations also can be very helpful because it can help students understand the game and help them follow the rules. Otherwise, they will misunderstand the purpose of the game and they may not get the benefits they should from the game. For example, if students do not understand the rules of one game called “Dictation Game” and just write without following the instructions, then it is just an exercise in copying, and it doesn’t help students with accuracy, pronunciation, or spelling at all.

In playing games, competition is very important because it can stimulate and encourage students to participate in the activity since naturally they want to beat the other teams. While playing, students have fun, relax, exercise, and tease their friends. Apart from having fun, students learn at the same time. They acquire new vocabulary along with its spelling and pronunciation. Students begin to realize that they have to speak or utter the words clearly if they want others to understand what they are saying.

#### **b. language Games Feature**

Language games have many features which make them a potentially valuable activity in the language class. Brown,<sup>3</sup> observes that there are six aspects of language games that deserve special attention: communication context; mood enhancement; group-building; student participation; competitiveness; incidental or spontaneous learning.

1) Communication context. Games provide what Brown<sup>4</sup> calls “meaningful contexts of genuine communication.” Students need not mimic the contrived, artificial, and stilted language of textbook conversations but can attempt to formulate appropriate language to express their own thoughts and emotions. Once the student has something to say, the teacher or lecturer can act as a counselor to perfect that communication.

2) Mood enhancement. The importance of the affective domain takes part in determine the learning process. The student's readiness to learn is influenced by physical as well as psychological factors. In playing games in small groups, students have a great deal more freedom than in more formal learning situations. Students feel more relaxed and their minds may be more attentive and receptive. A game is played, is relaxing and enjoyable. It is obviously

advantageous for students to enter into an activity with a sense of excitement and anticipation rather than threatening.

3) Group-building. The teacher or lecturer who is aware of the importance of the affective domain does everything in his or her power to make the classroom a friendly and supportive place. The relationships and interactions among students are dynamics which play a critical role in determining the success of a class. Small group work creates greater intimacy and cooperation among students and provides an opportunity for them to use their pooled knowledge to solve problems.

4) Student participation. The primary role of the teacher or lecturer, I have come to believe, is not to "teach" but to set up situations in which the student can learn. The old wise saying that "you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink" is particularly apt for learning. It is the student who is finally responsible for his own learning and he must play an active role in that process. Student-centered classes try to reverse the traditional situation in which the teacher or lecturer is the actor (i.e. active) and the students are the audience. Small group work is a way of assuring that the teacher has a less obtrusive role to play. While playing games, the students may entirely forget about the presence of the teacher, which means that they are absorbed in their task and focusing their attention what to do the best.

5) Competitiveness. Rivalry plays an important role in all human affairs and to some extent the progress of civilization seems to be linked to competition. There has probably never been a human society in which competition has not played a part. Games, contests and matches of skill seem, indeed, to be universals in the human experience. Because competition is such a persistent human characteristic and game-playing such a natural trait, competitive activities may well be able to facilitate the learning process. A word of caution, however, is necessary here. Competition is a double-edged sword. While it can promote progress in some circumstances, it can, just as easily retard it by causing intimidation. What teacher should build up is friendly competition.

6) Incidental or spontaneous learning. Students learn without realizing that they are learning. For instance, when playing a game called "What Would You Do If?" students will have to pick one hypothetical question from those that they have written in a box. They might get a question like "What would you do if a lion came into this classroom? The explanation might be "If a lion came into this classroom, I would be a fly because I am a good person, so an angel would come and rescue me by turning me into a fly." While trying to explain, students do not worry too much about grammar mistakes because they want to communicate and to explain why it can happen. Thus, they learn unconsciously-learn without realizing they are learning. Students stop thinking

about language and begin using it in a spontaneous and natural manner within the classroom

This kind of spontaneous, unconscious learning can be put to good use in the language classroom. When an objective of learning is set to absorb the attention of the participant, the real objective is frequently achieved without special effort. If a student is drilled on a sentence pattern, he or she may make errors because of his very attention. But if the student's attention is distracted by some unrelated task such as playing a game, the forgotten linguistic objective may be fulfilled effortlessly. Game-playing is an especially effective device for masking the real lesson.

### c. Advantages

So far the reasons for choosing game in language learning have been discussed in previous part. However, it is important to know what other experts say about the advantages of using language games.

In an effort to improve lesson plans in the ESL classroom, teachers or lecturers often turn to games. The justification for using games in the classroom has been well demonstrated as benefiting students in a variety of ways. These benefits range from cognitive aspects of language learning to more co-operative group dynamics.

Lee Su Kim<sup>5</sup> further elicits the advantages of using games in classroom:

1. Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class;
2. They are motivating and challenging;
3. Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning;
4. Games provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading;
5. They encourage students to interact and communicate. They create a meaningful context for language use.

Yin Yong Mei and Jang Yu-jing<sup>6</sup> in their article write the advantages of language game:

1. Games are fun and children like to play them. Through games, children experience, discover, and interact with their environment;
2. Games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. For many young learners, language learning will not be the key of motivational factor. Games can provide this stimulus;
3. The games context makes the foreign language immediately useful to the children. It brings the target language to life;
4. The games make the reasons for speaking plausible even to reluctant children;

5. Through playing games, students can learn English the way children learn their mother tongue without being aware they are studying; thus without stress, they can learn a lot;
6. Even shy students can participate positively.

Chen I- Jung<sup>7</sup> also delivers the benefits of using games in language-learning in nine points. He says that the games:

1. Are learner centered;
2. Promote communicative competence;
3. Create a meaningful context for language use;
4. Increase learning motivation;
5. Reduce learning anxiety;
6. Integrate various linguistic skills;
7. Encourage creative and spontaneous use of language;
8. Construct a cooperative learning environment;
9. Foster participatory attitudes of the students.

Another advantage is increasing students' proficiency. Playing games in the classroom can enormously increase students' ability in using language because students have a chance to use language with a purpose in the situations provided. Hadfield,<sup>8</sup> confirms that games provide as much concentrated practice as a traditional drill and more importantly, they provide an opportunity for real communication, though within artificially defined limits, and thus constitute a bridge between classroom and the real world. Like in a traditional classroom, students have an opportunity to drill and practice using grammatical rules and other functions. For example, look at the "Find Someone Who" game in which students have to ask classmates the questions implied by the chart, such as: "Can you swim?" "Do you have a pet?" etc.

Students have to come together around the classroom to find whoever these statements apply to and then write their names in the appropriate places. Whoever can fill their page first will be the winner. While playing, students practice asking and answering questions. They may have to repeat the same question several times until they get to the right person. This provides the opportunity to drill and repeat as in a conventional classroom, but with playing games it is more communicative and meaningful. Moreover, it will link students to the real world because they can actually speak like they are outside the classroom. Thus, playing games in classroom does not only give students a chance to use English, but it can also connect them to the real usage of language outside the class.

From the illustration above, we can see that games can be used not only to make entertainment, to sustain interest, create motivation, increase cooperation but also provide intense and meaningful practice of the language skills. Games are useful for students to express their own point of view or give information.

They are, moreover, help teachers or lecturers to create contexts as the games can be adaptable to the level of the students.

#### **d. Games Types**

It is important to know what types of game are available in order to plan a lesson with a balanced rhythm. There are many different types of games: card games, board games, games with music, and others. However, many games are difficult to label. Therefore, these following game types are based on their most outstanding feature.

1) Card game. Students collect, give away, exchange, sort, and count cards. The cards can have a meaning or value in a game, or simply serve as symbols for objects or actions. Cards are often components of other game types as well.

2) Board game. Any game which mainly involves moving markers along a path.

3) Dice game.

4) Drawing game. Drawing game is special because it spans a gap between key functions of the brain. On one hand, drawing requires creativity and sensitivity. On the other hand, the children must be able to understand instructions and describe their art.

5) Quiz game . Quiz game has many variations. The main features are the students propose guessing. They conduct asking and answering either in pair, groups, or in whole class. Well organized quiz games offer opportunity for every student in the classroom.

#### **e. Choosing the Games**

There are a great number of language games. So teachers or lecturers have a variety of choices. However, in deciding which game to use in a particular class and which games will be most appropriate and most successful with their students, teachers or lecturers must take many factors into account. According to Carrier,<sup>9</sup> says that teachers or lecturers should first consider the level of the game to fit their students' language level. They should choose the game that fits the purposes of that class or the content. Moreover, teachers or lecturers should consider students' characteristics: whether they are old or young, serious-minded or light-hearted, and highly motivated to learn or not. They should also consider when the game should be used because there is a big difference between using the game in the morning or in the afternoon, on Monday or Friday.

In addition to the factors mentioned, teachers or lecturers should also be able to play and overact sometimes to help students feel comfortable and want to join the activity. This means teachers or lecturers should thoroughly understand the game and its nature and be able to lead the game. It is quite difficult to find a game that meets all of the teachers' requirements. Some games must be adapted in order to fit students' language level, natures, and

characteristics. The most important factor is that games should be used when they can give students both fun and educational meaning otherwise they will be a waste of time.

Siek- Piskożub,<sup>10</sup> states that “there are many factors to consider while discussing games, one of which is appropriacy”. In this case, teachers or lecturers should be very careful about choosing games if they want to make them profitable for the learning process. If games are to bring desired results, they must correspond to either the student’s level, or age, or to the material that is to be introduced or practiced. Not all games are appropriate for all students irrespective of their age. Different age groups require various topics, materials, and modes of games. For example, children get most from games which require moving around, imitating a model, competing between groups and the like. Furthermore, structural games that practice or reinforce a certain grammatical aspect of language have to relate to students’ abilities and prior knowledge. Games become difficult when the task or the topic is unsuitable or outside the student’s experience.

Another factor influencing the choice of a game is its length and the time necessary for its completion. Many games have a time limit, but the teacher or lecturer can either allocate more or less time depending on the students’ level, the number of people in a group, or the knowledge of the rules of a game etc.

Hong Lin,<sup>11</sup> in his article suggests that students may wish to play games purely for fun. Teachers or lecturers, however, need more convincing reasons. They need to consider which games to use, when to use them, how to link them up with the syllabus, textbook or program and how, more specifically, different games will benefit students in different ways.’ The key to a successful language game is that the rules are clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun.

Below are some questions proposed by Hong Lin which we might consider as we choose a game:

1. Which language does the game target?
2. Which skills does it practice? The language skill focus could be any one of the major skills of listening, speaking, reading or writing.
3. What type of game is it?
4. What’s the purpose for using it?
5. Does it fit the students? How could I simplify or make it more complex if necessary? Many games require modification in use when the students’ need are taken into consideration.
6. How much interaction and participation is there? Maximum involvement is something we are pursuing.
7. Do I like the game myself?

Tyson<sup>12</sup> also gives some criteria as follow.

1. A game must be more than just fun;

2. A game should involve “friendly” competition;
3. A game should keep all of the students involved and interested;
4. A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself;
5. A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language materials.

#### **f. Using Games**

Having selected appropriate games for students, the teacher or lecturer then should have a concept of how to use games in classroom. Adelvin,<sup>13</sup> made clear by starting the procedure for playing games as follows:

1. Choose the game on the basis of their suitability in terms of the language they put into practice and also with regard to the students themselves (e.g. their age and interest). The size of the class must also be taken into account;
2. Prepare the game carefully beforehand; try to predict the language items that may be needed;
3. Explain to students (in the mother tongue if necessary) the purpose of and rules for the game;
4. Involve as many as students as possible, e.g. By deciding the class into two teams and also by letting the students take over for you if the game permits;
5. If the games are played on a team basis, points should be awarded for each correct answer and the scorer written on the blackboard.

Other suggestion given by Brown,<sup>14</sup> says that the following step-by-step sequence of events should help with the creation process:

1. Define learning objective. What will students be able to do after having played the game that they were unable to do before?
2. Set parameters. What is the time scheme within the game itself? For how long are students to be occupied in playing it?
3. Identify players and their goals. What role will each participants play? What will each seek to accomplish?
4. Identify the principle rules of play and determine how players will interact.
5. What will determine the sequence of events? What does each player do or not do to reach specified goals? Decide the direction in which players will move. Will players meet obstacles and route? If so, what will determine their actions? How should bonuses or penalty for chance occurrence be distributed? Will specific incentives be provided, either for progress during the game or for the winners?
6. Establish how and when the game is to be won. Will it be won by single players or by a team? Does winning means reaching a fixed goal

- first? Or do quality and quantity in meeting goals determine who wins?
7. List and describe the materials and arrangements required for play. Are required materials readily available, or obtainable at reasonable cost? Must materials be constructed? Are there appropriate facilities available to play the game?
  8. Undertake one or more trial runs. Try the game with a typical group of players; work out any problems. This step may save time, inconvenience, and later frustration for you and your students.
  9. Develop suggestions for post game evaluations. Suggestions for post game evaluation will assist players in assessing what they have learned from the experience and how their future performance in playing the game, and even the game itself, might be improved.

From the view above, when the teacher defines an objectives, he should be relate to the curriculum, state the objectives clearly, simply and measurably. The time is also important to decide for arranging the class game in time consuming.

#### **g. Focus on Speaking**

Language is a communication tool. Speaking is the most important part in speech development especially for youngsters. When they are able to make noise and start to adults, they try to ask for attention by making noise or speaking. The phase is -from one words utterance to two-word utterance than simple sentences. Once they are able to say simple sentences, the development in speaking is unstoppable. A miracle occurs in the time from birth to five years of age. Born with a limited ability to communicate, the young child enters kindergarten with the impressive command of the language spoken at home. Kindergartens have vocabularies of thousand of words and can carry conversation in complex sentences with adult and peers.

Oral communication is a two-way process between speakers and involves the productive skill of speaking and the receptive skill of understanding (or listening with understanding). It is important to remember that receptive does not imply passive, both in listening and reading, language users are actively involved in the process of interpreting and negotiating meanings.

Widdowson,<sup>15</sup> states that “an act of communication through speaking is commonly performance in face to face interaction and occurs as a part of dialogue or form of verbal exchange. It depends on an understanding.” Most everyday conversation is spontaneous, unplanned and unrehearsed. It takes place in real time so we need to think on our feet. Most conversations take place face to face (or voice to voice i.e. over the phone). Unlike writing, this

allows us to get immediate feedback, do our listeners understand us? Or not? We can judge many of these things from facial gestures, body language and of course our participants' verbal responses with their intonation. Conversation has a purpose, the nature of this interaction is transactional, the purpose is a very precise-action which is required as an outcome of the conversation. Conversation is interactive, in order to interact we more than one person.

Chastian,<sup>16</sup> also states that learning to speak is obviously more difficult than learning to understand the spoken language. Because of its difficulty, the students are supposed to achieve the speaking skill by doing much practice such as questions or expressing idea whether in the classroom or outside of classroom.

### III. Conclusion

Based on the previous explanation, it can be summarized as follow:

1. The language games are activities which have rules, goals, and elements of fun, competition, relaxation, cooperatives, and contextualization. These games have focus on helping students to speak. To see the effectiveness of language games as one technique in teaching language specifically speaking skill must show most of the properties above.
2. Language games have many types and variations of each type. Each variation needs preparations before performing it in speaking class. Language games are adaptable. This case offers teacher to consider the types of game and material difficulty level which will be practiced in the game and the level of students will learn.
3. The reason why using games is that language games promote enjoyable, friendly atmosphere and challenging, cooperative and adaptable activity. Language game can be as ice-breaking and the main instruction as well.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Baso. *The Assessment of the Speaking Skills of Students of English Department at IKIP Ujung Pandang*. Unpublished Thesis (Makassar: PPs of Hasanuddin University, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>Deesri, Angkana. *Games in the ESL and EFL Class*. (The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VIII, No. 9, 2002), h. 1. On line (<http://itselj.org/Technique/Desree-Hames.html>).

<sup>3</sup>Stevick, Earl W. 1982. *Teaching and Learning Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, h. 77.

<sup>5</sup>Lee Su Kim. "Creative Games for the Language Class" (Forum, Vol. 33, No. 1, January—March, 1995) Online (<http://exchange.state.gov/forum.vols/vol37/no1/p.35.html>).

<sup>6</sup>Yin Yong Mei and Jang Yu-jing. *Using Games in an EFL Class for Children*. Daejin University ELT Research Paper. Fall, 2000. On line (<http://english.daejin.oc.kr/~rtyson/fall2000/elt/games.html>).

<sup>7</sup>Chen I-Jung. "Using Game to Promote Communicative Skills in Language Learning". (The Internet TESL Journal. Vol.XI, No.2, 2005. On line <http://itselj.org/Technique/Chen-Using-Games.html>).

<sup>8</sup>Deesri, *op. cit.*, 2005.

<sup>9</sup>Deesri, *op. cit.*, 2002.

<sup>10</sup>Uberman, Agnieszka. 1998. "The Use of Games For Vocabulary Presentation and Revision ". (Forum Vol. 36 No 1, January – March, 1998), h. 20. On line(<http://exchangestate.gov/forum.vols/vol36/no1/p.20.html>).

<sup>11</sup>Hong Lin, "Using Games in Teaching English to Young Learners". (The internet TESL, Journal, Vol.VIII. No.8, 2002). On line (<http://itselj.org/Lesson/Lin-Using-Game.html>).

<sup>12</sup>Yin Yong Mei and Jang Yu-jing, *op.cit.*, 2000.

<sup>13</sup>Arsad Sugi. *The use of Games as One of the Strategies in Teaching English*. (Unpublished Thesis: Ujung Pandang: Faculty of Letter. Hasanuddin University, 1995).

<sup>14</sup>Arsad Sugi, *ibid.*, 1995.

<sup>15</sup>H.G. Widdowson, *Teaching Language as Communication*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>16</sup>Kenneth Chastian. *Developing Second Language Skills; Theory to Practice*. (Third Edition. New York: McNally College Publishing, 1976).

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