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GAME-BASED LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Annotation*. This paper demonstares the outcomes of the research related to use of language games in learning English. Learning languages through games has been one of the means of increasing motivation to learning a foreign language. The purpose of this study was to investigate the motivational effects of game-based learning on Kazakhstani EFL students. The authors believe that this approach is very germane to students and their interests, as well as conducive to learning. According to the finding the authors conclude that curriculum authors, course designers, and syllabus developers should pay more attention to the functions of game-based tasks and activities in teaching languages and improve the corresponding curriculums and materials.*

Keywords: *Game-Based Learning (GBL), motivation, role-play, challenging course, engagement, competition, assessment.*

ИГРОВОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Аннотация. *Данная статья демонстрирует результаты исследования, связанного с использованием языковых игр при изучении английского языка. Изучение языков с помощью игр является одним из средств повышения мотивации к изучению иностранного языка. Целью данного исследования было изучение мотивационного воздействия игр на казахстанских студентов, изучающих английский язык. Авторы считают, что игровой подход повышает интерес студентов к изучению иностранного языка. В соответствии с результатами исследования авторы приходят к выводу, что составителям учебных программ, разработчикам курсов и силлабусов следует уделять больше внимания функциям игровых заданий при обучении языкам и совершенствовать соответствующие учебные программы и материалы.*

Ключевые слова: *игровое обучение, мотивация, ролевая игра, студенты, сложный курс, вовлеченность, соревнование, оценивание.*

Introduction

Over the course of our teaching we have become very invested in learning

through games. After using and seeing games in action as part of mini-lessons we started to see how much more they could be used in language lessons. Anything can be made into a fun activity or a game. It does not have to be a game to be very fun and engaging for students either. At first games were implemented spontaneously without forethought. This approach had already utilized before and it became our go-to and something was seen a lot of value in. Game-Based learning was already in practice for a long, but it is getting more and more attention and different facets (potential of on-line, web-based technologies) to its use.

The game has to both grant learners autonomy and be focused on a clear goal. It takes more than incorporating learning materials into a game: it has to be centered on learning objectives, not offer any easy ways out, challenge students, and of course be fun.

It is believed that there are six key elements of GBL are needed to consider:

Competition: Whether students compete directly with each other or are cooperating to achieve a goal, a competitive element always helps to engage students and keep things going. Students need to be motivated to play to the end of a game, and competition is often a good way to ensure this. In the case of language learning, speaking/language practice can be maximized if partners rather than individuals play together.

Engagement: The game has to appeal to students and keep them involved at every step of the way. Losing student attention at any point can be jarring and mar the experience, so ensuring that it engages with students and matches the age group/sensibilities of the group is key.

Immediate Rewards: Perhaps the most critical, as students need to get hooked into the game. Any game will involve a learning curve, so it's very important to ensure that students feel immediately rewarded in some form (snacks, small prizes, certificates, points etc). If students can not be kept in the game at least long enough to overcome the learning curve, they will lose interest quickly.

Achievement: Students need to feel like they are getting somewhere. This can tie in to rewards, with those who win the game receiving prizes, but it can also be a

sense of accomplishment from a challenging game. Clear goals have to be set and accomplished within the game for good results.

Motivation: Students need to be motivated to participate in and finish the game. A good way to motivate students can be rewards, but it can also be tying the game in to their personal lives. Finding a game that students already play or similar to one they know can be a good way to achieve this.

Assessment: It is also important to give students feedback and allow them to demonstrate what they have learned. Perhaps a drill at the end of a game or a round of questions can achieve this goal, but whatever form it takes it is important to provide some sort of assessment to students to show them what they've learned and to evaluate as a teacher the effectiveness of the game. (Alim Al Ayub Ahmed et al 2022)

In this paper scholarly literature on the topic of GBL, sharing our experiences with it from both the student and teacher perspectives, as well as advocating its expanded use for teachers to create games, give activities the fun factor, use video games, and even incorporate role-playing are worth to consider here.

The abovementioned six key elements of GBL were tested during our research.

Methodology and research methods

58 respondents from a total of 74 were chosen to take part in the current study based on the results of the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). The respondents, who ranged in age from 18 to 20 and had an average level of English proficiency, were chosen from among students at Kazakhstan's Eurasian National University (ENU). English instruction at ENU lasted two years. The targeted respondents were given the options EG and CG at random.

The OQPT was the first resource the researchers used in their analysis. It was decided to use this exam to make the participants more comparable to one another. Knowing the participants' ability levels – elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced – might help the study's conclusions. Beginner students received scores between 0 and 10, elementary students received scores between 10 and 29, pre-intermediate students received scores between 30 and 39, intermediate students received scores between 40 and 47, and very advanced students received scores

between 50 and 100. The results of the test led to the selection of 58 intermediate students to participate in the current study.

It should be noted that the second and primary instrument was utilized to measure the subjects' levels of anxiety during the research's pretest and posttest. Following the lesson, the effectiveness of the game-based training in lowering the students' anxiety was evaluated once more using the Foreign Language Classroom (FLC) questionnaire.

Procedures

An assessment known as the OQPT was administered to participants as a first step in the conduct of this research to determine their level of proficiency. The target population of the current study consisted of 58 homogeneous respondents who were then randomly split into the experimental and control groups. After that, two FLC pretesting questionnaires were given to each group. In the first session, one FLC was given, while the second was given in a different session. Following the administration of the aforementioned questionnaires as pretests, game-based training was used to treat the EG participants. Students played the wacky and entertaining Spaceteam ESL (English as a Second Language) game with their classmates on their phones or tablets to acquire vocabulary (Jeanette Marie Benoit, 2017).

On the other hand, the CG was given conventional instruction. Without utilizing any games, the teacher came to the class and taught the students new vocabulary. Booklet comprising 90 English vocabulary words was given to the pupils, and 10 new words were trained for this group in each session. Students were given the word's definitions, explanations, synonyms, and meanings. In order to help the students understand the terms in a relevant context, the words were also employed in a phrase. Both FLC questionnaires were re-administered as the study's post-tests after teaching all terms in order to evaluate the treatment's impact on the subjects' motivation.

Discussion

It seems obvious that GBL is the incorporation of any type of game to facilitate learning. This is a broad category, including video games, role-playing games, board games, card games, sports, raffles and scavenger hunts. Anytime students have an

option to 'shortcut' their way through a game or accomplish it without learning.

Shirazi et al. (2016) examined how using video games affected EFL students' acquisition of speech acts (such as requests and apologies). Furthermore, it is a problem for many students that they won't speak in class either for fear of being wrong or for cultural reasons (like being seen as an exhibitionist, or rude, etc). Games help break down this barrier, as they demand participation and make it fun to participate, as well as shifting the tone. Students feel closer to the ideas and content being presented in a game, and the teacher can further challenge students with questions or objectives. There are also lingering historical conceptions of activities and roles for teachers and students in classrooms that predate the use of games. Teaching and professional development are ongoing processes, but whatever a teacher didn't bring in to their style earlier on may be difficult to develop or simply not have been thought of. Furthermore, many teachers may have the attitude that learning is not a game, and therefore not use GBL much or at all in their teaching. While we agree that GBL is not a solution for every situation, it should at least be used in a supplementary role in every class. (Jeanette Marie Benoit (2017)

The results of this study showed that playing games to reduce anxiety among Kazakhstani EFL learners is beneficial. Iranian EFL students in the EG had less anxiety thanks to peer relationships, teamwork, and a joyful environment created by the games. According to Grimshaw and Cardoso (2018) the enjoyable features of educational games might help students feel less anxious, which is crucial for the growth of English language acquisition.

Outcomes

One thing GBL accomplishes that few other things will is encouraging student interest. At the end of the day, even if you are the best teacher out there and your students are active, unless they cultivate a personal interest in the content they won't go on to investigate it further and really get into it. This makes the difference between students that took 4 years of English courses who go on to become fluent or can not even speak a word a couple years later. Ultimately, the teacher is facilitating learning, not shoehorning knowledge into students' heads.

It is crucial to make sure that there are no ways to cheat in the game because of this. This can be greatly improved with practice runs and having an extra set of eyes on the game, but the teacher must also keep an eye out for extremely competitive pupils and ensure physical safety (in the case of a physical game) or keep kids under control to prevent mental/emotional abuse. Although it shouldn't happen frequently, each game that is utilized in the classroom should be carefully chosen to avoid creating a hostile climate. One suggestion is that the teacher always choose teams and keep a tight eye on the situation.

It is also important to choose the right game for the right situation. Something like Kahoot or jeopardy are great review tools, and we find them amazing as pre-test exercises, but for introducing new content in language they will not be very useful. One could use some form of scavenger hunt or role-play to introduce new content, but they will not be as effective to students familiar with the topic. Role-plays are versatile, however, and we have even seen things like oral exams done with a role-playing approach: asking students to step into a role to answer questions or solve problems as a type of assessment.

Role-playing is sorely overlooked in teaching. It is a versatile activity and incorporates many skills, as well as carrying inherent properties from drama, theater, video-games, etc. Another often-overlooked category is video games: video games are great for encouraging interest in a subject, as students will play them for recreation, but it can be limiting. Unless you have programming skills and tons of time, you will not be able to design a video game for students that incorporates your class content.

Instead the teacher has to find a game that loosely aligns with the content of the course or associated skills in order to encourage interest.

Games like this also provide a great context for learning English in all around way. While in the classroom it is often black-and-white in terms of right versus wrong answers, in a game like SWAT 4 there are many possible solutions and players learn from their mistakes dynamically. Perhaps you could have negotiated for the hostages' release successfully, or maybe you had to storm in quicker to save them, or maybe either could have worked.

Video games also provide a sort of scaffolding to players for learning vocabularies. Distributed knowledge or distributed cognition is the property of video games to make players more effective before they are truly competent. What this means is that the game is programmed with rules and possibilities. Players can not easily violate these rules or innovate possibilities not already present within the game, so they are essentially being helped by the game itself to play it better. A player does not have infinite possible moves or actions, only those that are already within the game. This helps ameliorate frustrations in the learning curve of a game and keep players involved. This ties back in to immediate rewards and engagement.

Another insidious but potentially good aspect of games noted by John D et al (2008) is embedded professional or social practices. The swat example models the role of being in a swat team and the core competencies of that position to players, which can be very educational. It can help the player see from a new perspective and gain empathy for people in that position and understanding of associated professional competencies.

Social practices are also an important aspect. Gaming culture stands on its own and has its own slew of references and practices. A good example of this is the online game World of Warcraft. Here players progress with their character and become stronger through acquiring items and gaining experience for various activities. One of these activities are dungeons: challenging courses that require a team of people to beat. Every player of the game has encountered the free rider problem sooner or later through this: one or more members of a group will contribute very little or expect to be 'carried' through the dungeon, reaping rewards without putting forth effort. From this a social practice in World of Warcraft emerges: free-riders are warned (often with much profanity) that they need to contribute, then removed from the group if they don't get their act together and replaced.

This is a mixed blessing, however, as players may take this lesson too much to heart. Perhaps in real life the person in question may have a group member or partner who simply can't contribute as much, and may treat them too harshly as a result. But in a professional/business context it's often important to make sure you don't have such

free riders as they could create a lot of extra work for you or even sink a company. Modeling and professional/social practices can be very valuable in games, particularly video games, but they can also backfire.

Conclusion

This study examined the motivational and anxious effects of game-based learning on Kazakhstani EFL students. The findings of this study may have implications for those who create instructional materials and design courses for EFL students. Based on the findings, it is advised that curriculum authors, course designers, and syllabus developers focus more on the functions of game-based tasks and activities in L2 teaching and learning and enhance the corresponding curriculums and materials.

The use of various instructional game types in Kazakhstani EFL situations is highly advised in light of the encouraging findings. Educational games are important for teaching English since they can give EFL students an enjoyable and entertaining learning environment that can improve their English learning. In conclusion, games have the ability to create a calm environment for EFL students and teachers, making their use in language teaching and learning crucial.

This topic is still researched and used because GBL presents unique challenges and also unique rewards for both students and teachers. It was very interesting to discover the scholarly work on GBL and the shifting focus towards video games, and it has only increased the curiosity about this technique as well as our resolve to incorporate it into the future teaching.

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