

USING GAMES TO HELP CHINESE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

MEMORIZE ENGLISH NOUNS

Approved Wenim Son

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Chen Ping

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Abstract

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Chen Ping

Under the Supervision of Doctor Wonim Son

As we all know that vocabulary is the foundation of language. Of all vocabulary, nouns are the majority. But how can we help Chinese elementary school children to memorize nouns? That's a good question.

Taking age and features of psychology into consideration, the best way for elementary school children to learn English, especially memorize English nouns effectively, is games. While playing games, children are more relaxed and absorbed in games and inclined to communicate and cooperate with others. Therefore how to motivate children to participate in games and encourage them to use English should be given top priority when teachers design the games.

The present paper summarizes the existing research theories, and also proposes some suggestion on how to organize games in classroom. Meanwhile, it aims at catching people's eye to the significance of games in Chinese elementary school English teaching and learning and memorizing English nouns.

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Chapter I Introduction

As English becomes more and more international, it is accepted as the means of communication among people with different native languages (Tavıl & İşısağ, 2009; Ersöz, 2007), the teaching and learning of it is highly encouraged as well in many non-English speaking countries. In the modern world, children find themselves in an environment where lots of people communicate with each other in English. Therefore, the education of English is also more and more significant, especially the English teaching in elementary schools. But how to teach children as second language learners is still a puzzle.

Currently, in China, the aim of English course in elementary school is to stimulate children's interests in English study, help them have a sense of language and good pronunciation, children are expected to carry on simple daily conversations by learning English. Because children are more curious, vigorous and spontaneous (Tavıl & İşısağ, 2009), it suggests that teachers should apply proper teaching skills into the class in accordance with their stage of mental development (Slattery, 2005).

So, first and most important, teachers need to strive to stimulate children's interests in English learning. Teachers' sense of innovation and vivid games teaching methods all make contribution to it. As a new form of teaching, game teaching has been well received by children and teachers. Through games, children can not only learn new knowledge quickly and happily, but also consolidate what they have learned. From the perspective of teaching strategy and methodology, games are always the vital part of elementary school English teaching.

Of special interest is teaching young children the parts of speech in English. Although a study of the various parts of speech could be done, such a study might be too broad to cover in a meaningful way. Given that nouns are a critical to understanding language in both Chinese and

English, the review of literature related to “noun learning” in English is useful.

This focus of literature for the proposed paper will include the relationship between games and English learning for children and the types and rules of EFL games in elementary school English teaching and memorizing English nouns. The use of EFL games is significant in Chinese elementary school English teaching.

Statement of the Problem

The problem expressed as a question is, “How can we use games to help Chinese elementary school children memorize English nouns?”

Definition of Terms

ESL: Abbreviation for the term English as a Second Language.

ESL Games: Games and activities for ESL.

EFL: Abbreviation for the term English as a Foreign Language.

EFL Games: Games and activities for EFL.

ELT: Abbreviation for the term English Language Teaching.

CECSC: Abbreviation for the term Chinese Elementary School Children.

Nouns: any member of a class of words that typically can be combined with determiners to serve as the subject of a verb, can be interpreted as singular or plural, can be replaced with a pronoun, and refer to an entity, quality, state, action, or concept.(Merriam – Webster, 2005)

Teaching Strategies: Well-planned action or series of actions for achieving an aim, especially in a teaching situation. (Longman Advanced American Dictionary, 2007)

Purpose of the Study

In this paper, one viewpoint is emphasized that it's a good way to use games to help Chinese elementary school children memorize English nouns. The ultimate goal is to arouse the concern of Chinese English teachers about this and emphasize the urgent need to improve our English teaching methods.

Significance of the Study

This paper has sure application values and instructive significance of solving realistic problems. It enlightens the Chinese teachers especially those who are teaching English in primary schools the importance and the benefits of learning while playing and make them think about the contribution of games in children's English learning.

Delimitation of the Study

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over ninety (90) days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included "EFL/ESL games", "learning nouns", and "teaching strategy".

Methodology

A brief review of literature on the relationship between games and English learning for children will be conducted. A second review of literature relating factors, including types of games, rules and regulations set for EFL games that affect the effect of CESC's memorizing nouns will be conducted. The findings will be summarized and recommendations will be made.

Chapter II Review of Literature

Definition of games

Different people have different definitions for games. Hadfield (1990) defined that games consist of rules including a goal and an element of fun. Byrne (1995) defined games as a form of play governed by rules and said, “Games 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” (p. 101). So, games involve rules, competition, relaxation and learning (Deesri, 2002). From the above, we can draw a conclusion that games are activities playing with specific rules.

Then, what is an active game? A good game usually has the following elements: a specific goal, a set of rules, competition between players, language production (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992). Therefore, active games are able to motivate players to think, challenge and can promote students’ knowledge (Van der Meij, Albers & Leemkuil, 2011).

In brief, active games should not only activate the English class atmosphere, but also enable children to learn something from it. Games are the forms of learning strategies in which children can be taught to monitor their thinking.

Role of games in elementary school English learning

Generally speaking, the goal of the second language learning is to master the target language quickly and can communicate with others in the target language fluently. In order to achieve the goal, teachers should try hard to figure out the most efficient ways in teaching.

A saying says, “Interest is a good teacher for language learning.” In term of children, game is life and vice versa. Games can help children to sustain interest effectively. Taking part in games actively makes them enjoy studying and succeeding. Through playing games, children’s

intelligence and cognition can be developed sufficiently.

As to the pedagogy, it has at least three basic components: curriculum; methodology and techniques (Bowman & Donovan, 2006). Curriculum may be designed to encourage learning processes (memory, attention, observation) and cognitive skills (reasoning, comparing and contrasting, classification), as well as the acquisition of specific information, such as the names of the letters of the alphabet (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Methodology may include the teacher role, teaching styles, and instructional techniques (Siraj-Blatchford, 1998). Techniques may be the ones that teachers use to socialize children in repertoire of cognitive and affective skills required for successful functioning in society (Siraj-Blatchford, 1998).

Montessori (1964) argues children can develop skills, self-discipline, self-reliance and intrinsic motivation through activity. Hohmann & Weikart (1995) promotes to offer children active engagement in planning their learning. Brown (1982) advocates a curriculum should immerse children in a set of experiences that will ensure their cultural literacy.

From the above, we know that activity is important in children's language learning. Teachers in elementary schools must be concerned with supporting children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

Types of games for CESC to memorize English nouns

Undoubtedly, vocabulary is one of the essential elements of language acquisition and the size of vocabulary acquired influences directly the development of the learners' language competence (Peccei, 2000). In order to communicate fluently with others in English, an adequate number of words are required. Among vocabulary, noun is the majority. In order to help Chinese elementary school children memorize nouns better, teachers should realize that "children acquire

language by watching, listening, doing and imitating” (Tavıl & İşısağ, 2009, p. 299). That is to say teachers must attach great importance to the types of games.

Owing to different criteria, scholars clarify games as different types. De Jager (2009) divided games into two types: one is mental games that are mentally challenging and do not need a lot of physical exertion, the other one is physical games which are involved with exercise. Hadfird (1999) divided games into competitive games and cooperative games. In the former type of games, participants are to strive to be the best, to win at all costs. The latter one is designed to require participants to work and cooperate with each other in order to solve a problem or succeed as a team.

The benefits of games in vocabulary especially nouns learning and teaching can not be denied, but it is vital to choose the suitable games. Different types of games serve different purposes. An important aspect of what type of games is chosen concerns the contribution of a game to the school curriculum and learning goals (Dondi & Moretti, 2007; Moreno-Ger, Burgos, Martinez-Ortiz, Sierra & Fernandez-Manjon, 2008; Squire, 2007). Not all games deal with a subject matter that is part of the school curriculum.

In the China’s elementary school’s English book, nouns are usually closed to children’s daily life. Teachers can associate the nouns with the real objects, pictures, sentence structures, drawing and coloring, songs and rhymes, stories, etc. Through the visual input and sound input, children’s memory effect would be better. Teaching nouns through songs, stories, or matches are also good ways. Children could easily access to letters and nouns in many forms: alphabet blocks, letter cards, and board games, ABCs on wall charts, etc. All these are very good games to help children memorize nouns.

For example, the game named cards on the table can help children memorize the correct spelling of nouns. Each card bears one letter. Teachers put the cards on the table and ask children to spell the noun out and give its meaning. If failed, he or she is out of the game, teacher gives the correct answer. It's an enjoyable way to memorize nouns. Meanwhile, teachers must design different games so that children's interest can be lasting.

Story always is a central part of children's life and learning, children are sensitive to the sequence in language, and to sequences of events in stories. So it is a good idea for children to become story-tellers with narrative and its elements, such as characters, dialogue, and "what happens next". During the story telling, children can practice the words, including nouns, and sentences repeatedly.

Rules and regulations of EFL games

There are volumes of games in English learning and teaching in elementary schools. While selecting games, teachers need to evaluate their own practice and identify opportunities for students' personal and professional development within the context of internal and external factors (Van der Meij, Albers & Leemkuil, 2011).

If games are to be used in school contexts, it is important to examine very carefully each single product (Bottino & Ott, 2006). According to Carrier (1990), teachers should first consider the level of the game to fit their students' language level. As we know, children are quite different from adults in learning styles, abilities and motivation. Children learn what the individual words of specific languages mean by observing and imitating (Foster-Cohen, 2002). When dealing with children, it is often necessary for teachers to connect the individual goals to children's needs (Nunan, 2001). We can easily motivate children by selecting interesting

activities. When teachers ask them to play a game, children always prepare to enjoy. Once they dedicate themselves to games, children's performance varies greatly because of their different language competence (Foster-Cohen, 2002). So it is vital for teachers to realize the importance of making games rather than merely playing them (Good & Robertson, 2004; Kafai, 2006).

Creativity with language is a remarkable feature in children language learning. Children continually produce sentences and they do not just imitate what they hear, but to form new expressions by some general rules and principles (Goodluck, 2000). Elementary school children have their own cognitive characteristics, teachers should select and present topics based on children's current understanding. "If games are to bring desired results, they must correspond to either of the children's level, or age, or to the material that is to be introduced or practiced" (Tavıl & İşısağ, 2009, p. 308).

Due to different points in English, teachers can choose different games in class. In games for English learning and teaching, there are picture games, psychology games, word games, true or false games, memory games, question and answer games, story games, guessing and speculating games (Wright, Betteridge & Buchby, 2001). All kinds of colorful game can cultivate children to learn English efficiently and sustain their interest.

The design of each game involves four key aspects: be related to specific theme; define the specific measurable improvements; reflect games needs as well as the needs of children; include an evaluation component that determines the effectiveness of the games (Cheung, 2010). Once teachers select and design an active game, children' ability to absorb a second language can be spectacular (Robin, 2001).

The general condition of elementary English teaching in China

According to the *Basic Requirements for Elementary English Course* and the *New English Curriculum Standard* issued by the Ministry of Education of China in 2001, English are offered in elementary schools from grade three. In some developed areas and coastal cities in China, children study English even from grade one. In order to ensure the quality of English teaching in elementary schools, teachers must shift their old paradigms, update their teaching ideas and methods.

In China, an increasing number of teachers have been aware of the benefits of games. Games can draw children's attention, motivate children's interest (Lee, 1995), lower children's stress (Ersoz, 2000), offer children chances to practice the language (Lee, 1995) and help teachers to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 1984). In China now, many schools have better facilities for English teaching such as computers, projectors, language rooms, etc. Teachers can teach English by using flash, power point, video CD and so on.

Although in recent years, teachers have already accumulated a certain amount of successful experience, there are a lot of new problems arising from the field of English teaching in elementary schools.

Because of the lack of the sufficient systematic theory related to the strategy of games teaching, there are quite a few misunderstanding among English teachers in Chinese elementary schools and that misunderstanding could stunt the prospects of games teaching and teachers could not apply games correctly and thoroughly in class. The task-based teaching method, the problem-based teaching method and the communicative teaching method can not be understood deeply by teachers and can not be put into practice effectively. Some games are not designed properly and some even do not have any connotations at all, losing the significance and essence

of the games.

In addition, the quality and quantity of English teachers in many Chinese elementary schools do not meet the needs of English teaching. Many teachers have low professional qualities, low degrees and some of them may not be trained professionally at all. These are real problems existing in the elementary school English education in China.

Based on the curiosity and sense of fresh, elementary school children at lower grades usually perform very actively at the beginning of English learning. They have strong self-confidence and enthusiasm. Everyone in the class is eager to participate in the discussion. But with the deepening of learning, especially when children are in higher grades, they find that vocabulary is enlarged gradually, more language points come in so that they have few chances to play games any more. And teachers become more demanding, children have to recite words and texts over and over again and write down sentences what they have learned in the class. In most English class, teachers focus on explaining the words and language points, grammar structures and rules in detail, children take notes during the whole class. Lectures become boring and children's interest in English is decreasing. Children encounter more difficulties in their English learning. They may not learn it better than before or feel it is very hard to learn. Some of children may be depressed.

What's more, in China, it is well-known that our education has been influenced by the deep-rooted examination-oriented system for several decades. So, teacher-centered teaching methods are still dominant in China actually. Therefore, how to sustain children's interest in English learning is the priority.

Summary

While playing games, children are more relaxed and absorbed in games and inclined to communicate and cooperate with others. Pure English learning may be boring and it is absolutely difficult to attract elementary school students and make them love it. But learning from games can make things easier. Children can benefit more from playing while learning.

Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendations

Due to children's cognitive and psychological nature, it is a very efficient method to arouse CESC's interest in learning English and help them to memorize English nouns by using games. In games teaching, CESC play a more active and creative part in the English learning, rather than passive followers of the teacher's instructions and orders. What teachers do is to organize and lead games to be more appropriately supported, meaningful, enjoyable and full of practice.

The followings are some suggestions on how to use games in English learning and memorizing English nouns.

Firstly, teachers should return more of the class time to CESC and form the learner-centered model. In China, the classroom usually is the only place for CESC to practice their English. By practicing, children can learn English and memorize English nouns well.

Secondly, teachers should reconsider games design and make sure that the games should be related to children's real-world experience rather than in the principles of particular academic disciplines. They should be appropriate for children's level of intellectual development. Teachers should design games within the context which are clear and familiar to children.

Thirdly, teachers should provide more opportunities for the CESC to facilitate their output of English. More open questions should be encouraged because open questions offer more

possibility for children to practice English and feel communicating in a real English context.

Conclusion

As the importance of elementary school English teaching and learning is greatly highlighted by the whole society in China, more and more parents and teachers are concerned whether children like English or not? What games can build their interest? How can they keep their interest? Can they develop their intelligence through games? This situation brings us much excitement, but at the same time there are lots of new problems arising. One of them is that there are lots of elementary school English teachers who are still teaching with traditional approach which focuses on grammar and phonetic transcriptions, which may easily result in teacher-centered teaching model, in which children can only be passive while learning.

Through a review of the literature, to arouse the student's interest is the first step in elementary school children's English teaching. As a whole, if games are used effectively, they will develop children's interest and help children memorize nouns efficiently. How to sustain children's interest and how to improve the teaching quality in elementary schools? To achieve this goal, English teachers must realize the challenging they are facing and should try to explore more efficient teaching approaches.

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