

## USING GAMES IN ELEMENTARY ENGLISH CLASS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT  
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The use of game teaching methods in teaching English at the primary school level not only can increase students' interest in learning English, but also enhance the students' ability to learn English. Game teaching method is the theory and practice of the integration of games into the entire English teaching curriculum. Therefore, this paper will investigate and analyze the practice of elementary school English game teaching, trying to prove the advantages of game teaching in primary school English teaching, and make efforts to promote the development of English teaching theory through the inclusion of the game teaching method.

The author has carried out relevant theoretical explanations and analysis of primary school English game teaching, and has interpreted related concepts. By summarizing various aspects of the investigations it can be determined that both students and teachers have a high degree of recognition for English game teaching. This is especially in line with the psychological development characteristics of primary school students. Therefore, it is to access and strengthen students' enthusiasm for English learning, to promote students' all-round development, and also to help students to be relaxed. The teaching atmosphere can be helpful in improving language skills.

Only by correctly grasping the relationship between English classroom game design and its implementation can teachers establish and implement the correct teaching concepts and innovate the game form, which will help to further enhance the role and effect of primary school English game teaching.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL PAGE	i
TITLE PAGE	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	
Definition of Terms	
Purpose of the Study	
Significance of the Study	
Methodology	
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
Studies on Game Teaching	
Children's Cognitive and Psychological Features on English Learning	
Summary	
CHAPTER III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	11
REFERENCES	13

## **Chapter I Introduction**

In recent years, teaching English in primary school in China has experienced a gradual increase in value within society, and English courses have become compulsory at the elementary school level. But at the time of this writing, the status of English learning for primary school students is not an entirely optimistic one. Serious problems continue to exist in the teaching of primary school English. The most prominent problem is that the enthusiasm of primary school students for learning English is not high, and recently has shown a descending trend. To this end, many experts have begun to investigate how to improve the interest of learning English in the primary school student population and concomitantly what teaching methods could be used in the classroom to make the English classes for primary students more reflective of primary students' educational needs, thus being more reflective of children's needs. In other words, primary school classes need to be more fun. In this process, the teacher undoubtedly plays a pivotal role in the classroom, in lesson preparation and execution as well as in class room management. It can be a challenge to mobilize students interests and to awaken and sustain their enthusiasm for learning English and at the same time to grow a positive classroom atmosphere. In addition to mastering the necessary knowledge and skills of the subject matter, it is at least as important to require teachers to master the ability to mobilize the students' intrinsic interests and bring these together in a positive classroom atmosphere. For these reasons games as educational tools undoubtedly can play an important role in the English classroom. Therefore, this paper hopes to explore the feasibility of improving educators' interest in games for primary school English courses through a review of research. It also hopes that teachers will learn about the shortcomings in the game teaching process and improve those processes.

The reason why game teaching can be called an effective teaching method is that it

conforms to the characteristics and needs of children's physical and mental development and thus can improve the enthusiasm children bring to their English language learning. The focus of my research is to address how to integrate games in English teaching more successfully.

This study will use existing questionnaires, interviews and documented teaching cases to analyze the students' understanding of game teaching, teachers' implementations of game teaching and the English language learning after game teaching. This paper will report on the problems and deficiencies in game teaching, and report the relevant suggestions, which will provide a basis for teachers to improve the teaching methods of English teaching in primary schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In view of the above, the study was carried out to solve the following three questions:

- (1) What are the general ideas of students about games in English classrooms?
- (2) What are the teachers' attitudes towards the applications of the game in the primary school English class, and how do teachers use it?
- (3) What problems are likely to occur during the implementation of the game in the primary school English class and what measures can the teacher take to address and solve these problems?

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Definitions of games**

Different people may have different definitions for game. Wright *et al.* (2006) have taken the word "games" to mean 1) an activity which is full of entertainment and fun, often challenging, and 2) an activity in which the learners play and usually interact with others. Similarly, Hadfield (1984) defined games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of

fun”. Brown (1996) said “a game could be any activity that formalized a technique into units that can be scored in some way”. As for the famous educator Chen Heqin, he said that the game is children’s nature that for children the game is life and the life is a game (Chen, 2013). As chronicled in the above quotes, we can understand that games are activities played with specific rules.

### **Definitions of Games in English Classrooms**

Games in the English classroom are classroom activities with the goal of helping students receive language knowledge and skills, improve their English learning effectiveness.

*Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* defines “games” in language teaching as an organized activity that usually has the following characteristics: 1) a particular task or objective; 2) a set of rules; 3) competition between players; 4) communication between players by spoken or written language (Richards *et al.*, 1988).

Byrne (1995) defined game as a form of playing governed by rules. Game activity designing and operation should be enjoyable and fun for the students. They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities. The main educational goal is getting the learners to use the language in the course of the game (Deesri, 2002).

As a teaching method in the classroom, games in the English classroom should be a subsidiary to and be in accord with the specific requirements of language teaching and specific stated learning outcomes. Therefore, apart from the general features of language games, the games in English classes have their own additional unique features: 1) they inspire the students’ thinking and cultivate their spirit of innovation and exploration; 2) they are beneficial to students’ language learning; 3) they can enhance students’ speaking and communicative skills and ability.

In the process of English teaching, it is necessary for the teachers to distinguish English classroom games from other general games. Only in this way can games be fully made use of and assist the teaching efficiency while avoid negative side of games.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the current status and problems of the application of game teaching methods in primary school English. It provides practical advice for game teaching methods in primary school English teaching. Teachers can more clearly understand that the game teaching method can effectively improve students' interests in learning and promote the development of students' English learning ability.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research not only has theoretical significance and practical value for English teaching. In order to enrich the theory of primary school English teaching, the game teaching method can be appropriately applied. In addition, this study mainly explores the problems of game teaching method in primary school English teaching. And it also provides some feasible suggestions for the use of games by primary school English teachers in the English classroom. Lastly, it also will prove that the game is a feasible method for teaching English and learning English.

### **Methodology**

This paper is written using library research. This study is presenting a series of investigations on English game teaching in primary school classes. Firstly, the research questions and the corresponding purposes are articulated. Secondly, the research methodology such as subjects, the instruments to collect data and the tool for analyzing the data is described. As method, this study applies a qualitative-interpretive stance into the inquiry. To sum up, this study is dedicated to introducing the methodological concerns--data collection and data analysis.

## **Chapter II Review of Literature**

Game teaching is one teaching activities which can be utilized during teaching. From ancient times onward, there are many relevant practices and expositions on the importance of the game as educational tool. This part will draw an outline of related studies to the game teaching theory to provide a whole picture of the concept of game teaching.

### **Studies on Game Teaching**

Beginning with the perspective of ancient Greece, western education, especially children's education in western countries has been filled with the description of the relationship between games and teaching. Plato, for example, focused on the role of games in children's education. He agreed that games should not only be seen as the vehicle to carry out competition, but also to provide, and combine it with moral education. At that time, games, such as guessing games, playing games, and throwing dice were widely used.

In the 18th century, the French philosopher Rousseau stated that children should be free to express their energies so that they can develop their talents, echoing another ancient concept discussed by Plato. Rousseau believed that children are able to learn better through games and that these in turn can make learning fun, useful and easy. What's more, he pointed out that children should leave their "torment books" and spend childhood with games or other activities.

During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in his groundbreaking work the German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel (2005), formulated game teaching practices as a theoretical system. Froebel, a student of Pestalozzi, recognized the importance of early childhood in a person's development and is seen as the father of child-oriented German children's education. He was the first person to systematically explore teaching with games and advocated integrating games into the learning process. Another pioneer educator of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Maria Montessori. Montessori's

curriculum emphasizes three types of activities: 1) practice; 2) senses; 3) formal skills and research. The category practice would include social activities such as setting the table, serving a meal and washing dishes, etc. Montessori was a physician and an early expert in childhood development. She has made a permanent contribution to the theory of children's education and game teaching after Froebel.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the American philosopher and educator Dewey (2005) emphasized children's personal needs and interests in their educational development. He also stressed that children should learn through practice or experience so that they would understand the world around them. John Dewey developed the following influential ideas for education:

1) Life and education are interrelated and not separate. Education is life. Education is not about preparing for life. Classroom teaching is a part of life itself instead of a preparation for it. 2) Children will learn through behavior. 3) The continuity of experience is critical to growth. To reflect this philosophy, Dewey drew the material for his textbooks from nature and articles of everyday use.

## **Children's Cognitive and Psychological Features on English Learning**

### **1. Attention Span**

It is well known that children's attention tends to be short-lived, especially when students are bored or when they have difficulty learning. If the teaching materials are too difficult for the students, the students' motivation for learning will be reduced. This is especially true for elementary school students, who are easily distracted.

Therefore, the teacher's teaching method should be interesting so that it can attract and sustain students' attention. Teachers can design a variety of game activities to maintain student interest and attention. In fact, a large number of game activities need to be carried out in different

forms in order to attract the attention of children as much as possible. Teachers should be energetic and enthusiastic about teaching and infect students through their passion.

In addition, children are strongly curious about their environments. Teachers can use this curiosity of students to attract students' attention. Games can be designed to focus students' attention on specific vocabularies, themes, structures and grammatical pattern. Repetition or overuse of the same kind of activities may make the children feel bored and tired.

## **2. Memory Span**

Children are different from adults because they have a fast but relatively short memory. They can remember quickly in a relatively mechanical way. They can easily repeat the stories or other content they just learned, they can retell stories et cetera verbatim without missing or changing any words. Many children in China begin to memorize and recite poetry as early as preschool. They may feel that it is easy to remember and recite poetry, but the truth is that they don't understand the meaning of every word they speak when reciting. These children can easily remember spelling or pronunciation without much effort through a process called "mechanical memory". Games used correctly can help students learn more deeply and the ability to store knowledge in the longterm memory is an important aspect to foster. As children grow older, they feel that it is getting harder and harder to memorize things.

## **3. Psychological Feature of the Young Learner**

In fact, teaching young learners is very different from teaching adults. It is the norm for the children of elementary school age to change their mood in a minute and it is extremely difficult for them to sit still. Moreover, they show greater motivation than adults when they are engaged in activities that seem to be appealing to them, or stated in a different way, when they can engage in learning activities which address intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the teacher has to be smart

and flexible in selecting appropriate activities. This means that different forms and types of games should be incorporated in lesson plans for young children versus lesson plans for young adults.

Generally, children are effective learners because they tend to be interested in everything but sometimes they feel anxious to learn. For most children it can be said, that they have all immediate need to be motivated by the teachers or the material in order to learn effectively (Penny, 1996). By selecting interesting activities, you can raise children's motivation and enthusiasm successfully because they are always curious about a great variety of interesting things. Games are excellent means to help maintain the curiosity of students in the English classroom. Most of the time, when the teachers ask the children to play a game, they do like to show that they are prepared to enjoy this activity, because it feels good for the children to have all five senses stimulated. Having noted this it is important to underline that all game activities should strive to go beyond the visual and auditory modes, which the teachers usually feel are sufficient for a language learning classroom. It is known that games use both visual and other comprehensive ways to activate the language production. In order to integrate a varying combination of senses, or even all five senses together in a game activity, we can utilize games such as guessing games, Total Physical Response (TPR) activities, and role-playing.

### **Summary**

From the above, we can conclude that game is an efficient way for students to learn English. It is helpful to develop children's physiological characteristics, foster their interest and also stir their desire for knowledge. However, there can be some problems with integrating game into the elementary English classroom. Below are some general explanations.

Firstly, the perspectives of students will be analyzed. According to the survey, with grades increasing, students' interests in English are diminishing. Consequently, a more interesting way for students to motivate them to learn English should be explored. Among all the factors contributing to their interest of English, game works as the most important factor for pupils because of their special physical and psychological features. In this way, it's wise for teachers to make full use of games as a teaching method to help students learn English happily and easily. Among them the most popular form is action response games and listen and response games. How these different forms are integrated in the teaching process is vital for the successful application of game. It is also suggested that teachers can make use of Gardner's multi-intelligences theories in daily teaching and lesson plan designing. As a result, students may be developed from various perspectives and therefore are less likely to easily lose their interest and passion for learning.

Secondly, from the perspective of teachers, their attitudes toward and understanding of games vary from person to person. Teachers from a younger generation may be more likely to regard games as an effective way to assist teaching and learning, while for those teachers who are from older generations attitudes toward games tend to be more negative. For teachers with more negative views of games, game application may cause discipline problems among students and if the applications of games is not well planned, it may be a waste of time instead of engaging the students in learning. To some extent, their attitudes towards games within the classroom setting may negatively impact the atmosphere of the classroom. Although most teachers agree that it is important for a teacher to learn some theories concerning games as an educational tool to further their teaching, few of them put that learning into action. As for the sources of games, most teachers only use games from their own experience or from

demonstration classes and few of them have recognized the importance of the creation of games adapted to different teaching objectives and circumstances. In a word, there is still much room for teachers to develop their understanding towards game inclusion. It needs to be recognized that it takes time and energy to practice different forms of games so that these forms can be flexible used in the classroom.

### **Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations**

According to the previous study, games in the English classroom has many advantages and they will surely benefit the English learners.

It has been shown clearly that games are popular among children. To incorporate and make a more effective use of games in primary English classrooms, here are some principles for teachers' references when designing or applying games based on research on this subject.

#### **1) Interest-focused Principle (Intrinsic Motivation)**

Interest, including direct interest and indirect interest serves as a crucial means to arouse students' intrinsic motivation. (Zhang Zhengdong, 1999) The intrinsic motivation to want to learn something can be enhanced by the use of interesting material, such as flash, gif pictures etc. Game serves another means and adds variation to an interesting lesson. At the same time, game can increase students' motivation by providing a plausible incentive for using the target language. For the students, language learning itself will not be the key motivational factor, but games can provide this stimulus. Since games stimulate the students' interest, game playing at the good way and proper time will be one of the highest positive motivating techniques.

#### **2) Learner-center Principle**

In learner-centered education, students are usually put in the center of the instructional activities. It begins with understanding the learning contexts of students. The learner-centered education continues with the instructor evaluating the student's progress towards learning objectives. By helping the students acquire the basic skills, it ultimately provides a basis for learning throughout the whole life. Students assume the responsibility for learning while the instructor assumes the responsibility for facilitating the students' learning. This approach strives

to be individualistic, flexible, competency-based, varied in methodology and not always constrained by time or place.

### 3) Task-based Principle

Dewey's learning-by-doing is exactly one of the main principles for task-based approach. Learner participation in class is related significantly to improvements in language proficiency. When using games in the English classroom, the learners are at the center of learning as they are asked to use English to do something as a task. English acquisition will be maximized when learners are engaged in tasks which "push" them to utilize their current competence to its limit. In this way, they are going to acquire the new language knowledge and skills.

### 4) Multi-intelligences Development Principle

As we all know that the primary school period is very important for children's intelligence, and physical as well as social development. It is true that creativity can be expressed through the various intelligences. In this way, the teacher can apply eight intelligences in each lesson through the different games or tasks, such as guessing game, matching game, etc. Logic-mathematical intelligence can be developed through the guessing game and puzzles. While we can develop the verbal-linguistic intelligence through listening and speaking games, we can develop the musical intelligence through verbal and rhyming games.

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