

THE EFFECT OF LANGUAGE GAMES ON LEARNING ENGLISH LISTENING-SPEAKING SKILLS OF IRANIAN PRE-SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of language games on English listening-speaking skills of Iranian pre-school EFL learners through applying communicative language teaching according to Morrow and Freeman as the best method and the activities are due to Functional communicative ones. A class of 38 male and female homogeneous learners at the Maryam Language Institute in Tonekabon, Mazandaran were chosen randomly from among 6-7 range of age. The learners took MC Connell's IGD (individual growth and development indicator) listening-speaking test as a pre-test, then after 24 sessions, 3 hours each week, were taught according to the determined syllabus and activities, a post-test was taken. The results of a t-test showed that language games had a significant effect on the listening-speaking skills of the learners.

Keywords: *Listening-Speaking Skills, Language Games, Communicative Language Teaching, Functional Communicative Activities*

INTRODUCTION

The most important factor of human beings' growth and improvement and their first communication tool is language. Today, for communicating effectively among cultures, using national language may seem to be enough. But by considering the world of information technology applying an international language is the most important need in developing scientific, cultural, economical, social, and political issues.

There are various ideas about the age and the methods of foreign language learning but it can be said that in all of them they point to the same aspect, and that is children in comparison with adults learn a foreign or second language easier and it will remain more.

One of the best methods of teaching listening-speaking skills to pre-school learners is getting help from language games. Byrne (1995) gave 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, Hadfield (1990) defined games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun."

Games using in language learning involve factors like rules, competition, comfort, and specially learning. The most important factor in using games in English language classes is helping learners to learn mingling with fun. According to Carrier (1990) teachers should first consider the games level to make them suitable with the learners' language levels. They must be chosen due to the purposes of the class or the content as well as considering the learners' characteristics as their age, being serious-minded or light-hearted, and their amount of motivation to learn the language as well as the time of using the games.

Angkana Deesri refers to Richard-Amato's idea about language games, "even though games are often associated with fun, we should not lose sight of their pedagogical values, particularly in second language teaching. Games are effective because they provide motivation, lower students' stress, and give them the opportunity for real communication." Increasing motivation and decreasing stress are the other reasons for making language games involve in English language classes. According to Schultz (1988), "...Stress is a major hindrance in language learning process. This process [Learning language in traditional way] is by its nature time consuming and stress provoking... .. raise the stress level to a point at which it interferes with student attention and efficiency and undermines motivation. one method has been developed to

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make students forget that they are in classrelax students by engaging them in stress-reducing task (games)."

The research done by Glisan (2001) showed that pre- school and elementary school students had more development in problem solving skills, did better in using their mother tongue, and they were more ready to accept cultures.

Neurologists claim that the nerves of a new born baby is similar to a computer waiting to be programmed during the first years of his life. Some of them consist of the skills like the ability to see and recognize objects and faces, and learning a language.

According to Curtiss (2001) "...the power to learn language is so great in the young child that it doesn't seem to matter how many languages you seem to throw their way...They can learn as many spoken languages as you can allow them to hear systematically and regularly at the same time. "

Joanne (2004) says, "From experience, the best way to teach children English is to not only get them physically involved within the lesson, but also to create the illusion that they are simply playing games. And rather than focus on individual development, it is also a very good idea to promote class interaction as far as possible. Here are some easy inspirational ideas to try or to adapt within your classroom."

In comparison with the traditional methods of learning and teaching a language, CLT makes learners involve in meaningful activities and different kinds of exercises in the field.

Wright *et al.*, (2005) in an article of Huang (1996) concluded that "learning through games could encourage the operation of certain psychological and intellectual factors which could facilitate communication heightened self-esteem, motivation and spontaneity, reinforcing learning, improving intonation and building confidence."

Uberman (1998) refers to her observation of how her students showed interest in learning through games. She states that by using games, learning is more interesting and effective. She also confirms that language games are helpful in teaching and learning vocabularies. Accordingly, related to Uberman's findings, Ersoz (2000) claims that using games in teaching and learning English language is helpful to practice the skills of communication of learners.

Statement of the Problem

Some teachers believe that using language games is just wasting time and they prefer not to use them in class except for fun. While language games can be very useful help for improving learners' speaking-listening skills beside other learning tools.

The purpose of this study is investigating the effects of language games on English listening-speaking skills of Iranian pre-school EFL learners through applying communicative language teaching and Functional communicative activities by making the role of games clear in the process of learning English. The significance of the study

From among the methods of learning a language, using language games is one of the best. As far as in childhood, games are from different kinds, joyful, creative, and entertaining, they can be used for pedagogical aims in learning English language too. In this way, the bases of learning English as an international language can be shaped in children's mind to take advantage by knowing it for getting more knowledge and information needed to make their life and society improved.

Research Questions and Hypotheses of the Study

The present study will try to answer the following question:

1. Do language games affect learning English listening-speaking skills of Iranian pre-school students?

Based on the research question the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Language games have no effect on learning English listening-speaking skills of Iranian pre-school students.

* Significance level in this hypothesis is $P=.05$.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population in the study was 38 male and female students in pre-school of Maryam institute in Tonekabon, Iran whom were chosen randomly from among 6-7 range of age. They are joint the class

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intentionally due to their interest in learning English language, none of them have been in a native English country before and have no background knowledge about this language.

Two tests, one as pre-test and one as post-test, were used in the study consisted of concepts of numbers, colors, objects around them, body parts, family members, name of some animals, and some fruits in the form of pictures, and paintings to evaluate the learners' knowledge.

The pre-test was done in the first session before teaching the lessons for determining what the learners know and what they don't know about the concepts.

The post-test was applied at the end of the 24 sessions to reveal if the study could achieve the desired aim. In this study, IGDIs (Individual Growth and Development Indicator) made by Connell (2000) was applied as a pattern to measure the amount of English language learned by the learners.

The characteristics of this test are:

1. Effectiveness of administration
2. Scoring
3. Data interpretation
4. Providing valuable information for decision-making on primary education

This test consists of some parts about picture naming, rhyming, and alliteration.

After teaching stage during 24 sessions was held, the gained data was measured and analyzed through paired sample t-test by using SPSS software. This test is a measuring inside one group in two situations to find that by considering the significance of $P=.05$, if the null hypothesis can be confirmed or rejected.

Descriptive Statistics of Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the data collected from the applied tests will be presented.

Table 1: Frequencies of two scores of two tests from the same group

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Sum
Score 1	38	2.83	3.00	3	1.16	1.34	108
Score 2	38	10.61	11.00	10	3.02	9.11	403

Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Table 2: T-Test, Paired sample statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Score 1	2.83	38	1.16	.19
	Score 2	10.61	38	3.02	.49

Table 3: Paired sample Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Score 1 & Score 2	38	-.051	.762

Table 4: Paired samples test, paired differences

	Sig.(2-tailed)	T	df	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference	
							Lower	Upper
Pair 1 Score 1 & score 2	.000	-14.580	37	-7.78	3.29	.53	-8.86	-6.70

The difference between pre-test and post-test is shown in table 4, it reveals that $t = -6.70$ and the significance level is 0.05, the $n\ t(37) = -6.70$; $P < .05$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting data and statistical measurement done, the final results of t-test showed that there is a clear difference between pre-school English learners in two different situations. The null hypothesis was rejected according to the difference with 95% degree of confidence and .05 level of significance.

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Significance $\rightarrow t\text{-observed} = -6.70 > t\text{-critical} = 2.021$

The results showed that using language games in teaching English as a foreign language at pre-school level had a positive effect. It can also be claimed that the statistical population after being taught according to this technique, had better performance in comparison with before being taught.

It is found that naturally during playing language games, learners try to win and progress from other competitor groups for their own benefits. This can increase their motivation and stimulate to go ahead in learning stages and being active successfully. Therefore, it will provide teachers to teach their students different ideas, grammatical rules, making sentences, general knowledge, etc.

It is obvious that using games can take students' attention and encourage them to join the activities, specially group working, and increasing their learning motivations as well as making classroom as a very fresh and happy place. It is also useful for decreasing the amount of stress and anxiety mostly students have during learning a foreign language and they will find this way of learning so enjoyable.

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