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**CENTRO DE IDIOMAS**

TITULO:

**Using games to promote communicative skills in an  
English Language Classroom.**

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## **Abstract**

The following paper is based on the use of Games as activities that students like to do and let them use vivid language while they are creative and active in the classroom, because they are task-based and have a communicative purpose to let the students to use the language in their learning. Oral communication is a top priority to develop language competence and skills in order to reach a B1 level in the use of English. The objective of this paper is to show how games can be used in language teaching to increase the student's conscious participation in the language activities, using games the researchers consider motivation to learn English will increase. So, for that goal, the authoresses have gathered the information about linguistic games and give some ideas on how to use some of them for different purposes in different moments of the lesson. Although every teacher has his or her own way of using and incorporating the communicative games that suit the purpose of teaching and learning the English language. In order to complete this task the researchers have planned to use the methods of analysis and synthesis and the inductive and deductive methods from the theoretical perspective. Besides, the analysis of data compile and its comparison from the empirical point of view.

**Key Words:** Games, motivation, communication, speaking skills, activities.

## 1. Introduction

Today there are more concern on how English is taught and learned. Then language researchers and teachers have concentrated on developing linguistic skills in order to use the language for communicative objectives. This concern on communicative competence, leads language teachers to use activities that promote the use of language to communicate that engage their students in creative language use. But creative language use needs to be trained and needs more possibilities for the students to participate on purpose in the classroom activities.

Games are among the activities that students like to do and let them use the language with some degrees of creativeness, because they are task-based (other authors like Larmer, Mergendoller and Boss (2015) include them as project-based or as a way of learning (SERC, 2015) independently) which have a clear purpose to get the production of correct speech and help the students get deeper into other communicative activities (Saricoban & Metin 2000). Games let the students to have fun or to show how they can succeed to "use the language" and that is why teachers are using the language games more frequently in today's teaching.

Games suits in the students' learning styles as they offer students a relaxing learning atmosphere and the chance to meet their expectancies. After learning and practicing new vocabulary, students have the opportunity to use language in a non-stressful way (Uberman 1998). But in fact, it is a way to show what they can do while playing different games. That is the learners' attention is on the message, not on the language, so they can be more natural to participate in class. In a lesson in which a game is always present, anxiety is reduced and thus the possibilities to be creative and get the fluency they need for communicative competence. Besides, games are part of that new generation atmosphere for learning going back and for in real life: "The World Wide Web has had a significant effect on the way they [young people] think and learn. They are used to thinking on multiple tracts at once, but have little patience with linear reasoning or delayed gratification" (Teed, 2016).

Games are also good for motivation and challenges. Games present an element of competition into the activities for learning the language. This offers valuable input for a purposeful use of language (Prasad 2003). Thus, the activities must be more significant for the students for language use. The competitive activities are tasks the students like to prove they are able to fulfill for a team or for themselves, but without noticing how much they are practicing unconsciously. Because as Talak- Kiryk (2010) noticed: "Games provide a constructivist classroom environment where students and their learning are central."

In Ecuador the increase of oral practice of the English language has obtained paramount importance for teaching as the oral code is needed to reach the

levels required for university students to communicate in the foreign language. Oral communication is a top priority while developing language competence and skills, as speaking is compulsory to reach a B1 level in the use of English.

So the objective of this paper is just to show how games can be used in language teaching to increase the students conscious participation in the language activities, so for that goal, the writers have gathered the information about linguistic games and give some ideas on how to use some of them for different purposes. Of course, each teacher has the right to incorporate one kind of communicative game or another in searching of what it could be more useful for the purpose of teaching and learning the English language.

In order to complete this task the researchers have plan to use the methods of analysis and synthesis to get conclusions upon the best way to use the different games and the inductive and deductive methods to provide the methods that can be useful for each moment of teaching and learning. Besides, the analysis of data compile and its comparison will be very useful to reach different conclusions in the research work.

## **2. Development**

The need to improve the learning and teaching of English is a constant issue in many countries, no matter their official language. In Ecuador Spanish and other languages are important, as so it is English for developing the country. A lot of actions have been done to improve it in Ecuador and it is still a priority because there is an educational objective already settled to be reach in the near future.

Back to 1992, the Ecuadorian and British governments signed an agreement of bilateral technical cooperation with the main objective of improving the quality of teaching and learning of English in the country then a curricular reform was needed, which was beginning with a Project called CRADLE, which meant a first step towards improving English teaching and learning in the following items: Guidance for the use of the new English curriculum, Methodology for teachers, Professional readings in the university majors, Improving English language for teachers of all levels, use of English in the classroom to communicate, training in pronunciation and usage, the National Test of English, etc, so the results of that first step could be seen in our students today in the University classrooms.

But education in Ecuador has also undergone many other changes, today we can mention the new reform of the education law which brings many benefits that are very important for the country especially in education programs and projects. In "the National Plan for Good Living" the importance of respecting the cultural differences in the country allows policies that favors learning other languages. English is important to learn because it is the international language, and its goals must be to communicate freely in English for different purposes.

"... State and society both have shared responsibilities to ensure the conditions for the permanence and reproduction of culture in its multiple expressions. Ecuador's plurinational and intercultural character means that the State must adopt a broad and inclusive conception of culture. The State must take into

account and mirror the multiplicity of symbolic universes expressed in Ecuador's diverse historic memories, and recognize the practices and livelihoods of the different peoples and nationalities. Additionally, the State must recognize the practices of cultural groups that emerge as the result of contemporary social transformations (SENPLADES, 2010).” For that reason, to communicate freely in English can help in the reproduction of culture in its multiple expressions. It can also help to build a sense of multi-national and intercultural Ecuador.

So, culture and language in English as a foreign language are components of what is taught today, and it is considered as a right for education, multiculturalism and multi-nationality. Therefore, it determines the general principles and purposes that guide the Ecuadorian education under the Good Living (SENPLADES, 2010).

Games are present in all human beings at a given moment of the development of its personality. As an activity for learning, its potential as a method for educational work and formation in children is recognized, especially under the scope of Lev S. Vygotsky's theory. Therefore, its use for the language learning will provoke ease at the student's tasks.

This will lead researchers toward how it functions and the benefits in order to find out the best ways the students should use the language in the classroom. The benefits of using games in language learning can be summed up in the nine points that Chen has explains in his most important articles (2005).

- Games are learner centered.
- Games promote communicative competence.
- Games create a meaningful context for language use.
- Games increase learning motivation.
- Games reduce learning anxiety.
- Games integrate various linguistic skills.
- Games encourage creative and spontaneous use of language.
- Games construct a cooperative learning environment.
- Games foster participatory attitudes of the students (Chen, 2005).

Games should not only be seen as a participatory activity. In order to have games in the lesson the teacher has to plan careful each step and the purpose of the activity to get the best results. They should have some help from other teachers who are publishing the best materials in this field so that the students and teacher can remember what to do in the class. Besides, there are three characteristics that any game must include: “1) **Competition**: the score-keeping element and/or winning conditions which motivate the players and provide an

assessment of their performance. 2) **Engagement**: Once the learner starts, he or she does not want to stop before the game is over. And 3) **Immediate Rewards**: Players receive victory or points, sometimes even descriptive feedback, as soon as goals are accomplished.” (SERC, 2015)

Based on the advantages of games about learning English, teachers must keep in mind when to use them. They could be used during the warm up of the lesson, or during the lesson or at the end to conclude the lesson, in the school or the university because they are designed to get the language into English competition to help students experience fun and usefulness of English.

That is why to share with other teachers the games is very important. The teacher can play or demonstrate for the students and make some observations to highlight what they mean, as games have rules that students have to observed to learn how to do each in a right way, the following language games are explained for the three parts of the lesson:

For the beginning of the lesson, that is before the main content is introduced, the teacher can promote exercises to have fun in the classroom, the objective is to let the students get into the mood of English before they get the main points of the lesson; but the games they play at the beginning can also be related to the lesson as such. The examples of games are the following:

**Fast English**: This is good for memory and retaining items of the language. The students have to listen or read some words that must match with the pictures they are given or the nearer in meaning poster displayed in the classroom. It could be a competition between two teams so they are given the same opportunities to find the same amount of words in the pictures.

**Special Landmarks**: This is good for guessing and finding connections. The students have to assemble a 20-piece jigsaw puzzle of a world famous landmark (such as the Cristo in Rio, Eiffel Tower, the Bomboli hill, the Chimborazo volcano, etc or local places like the Carrizal River or any other important location). Then they describe puzzle image in five sentences to complete the task. But, most of the pictures they have to describe should be of those places they know from the country (Garcia and Quevedo, 2016) and Ecuador has a lot of famous places.

This game encourages students' productive skills and let them to practice their speech fluency. Again, the number, the length, and the patterns of sentence can vary depending on the students' language ability and linguistic points the instructor would like to reinforce.

**The hangman**: this is good for guessing and spelling the words they have learned before. The students take turns in saying one letter at a time to complete a word or phrase related to a given topic, but at the beginning they only have one letter on the board to guess about it, if they are not able to guess the man is hung in. Though, the main objective of this game is spelling, to anticipate is also needed for oral practice, so don't forget that English is a system that everything helps to get the sense of the language.

For the while lesson activities, when the lesson is clearly focusing in the objective, the teacher can also play games as exercises related to the different tasks they have to solve to get the new content introduced, practiced or rehearsed to be incorporated in the active language they learn. Here are some important examples:

What's the Number? This is a good exercise to practice reading numbers and it is better when you can adapt it for reading real information with numbers, anyway what is achieved out of this game is finding a logic solution to real problems in their lives. The procedures are quite simple:

- 1- Divide the class into two equal teams.
2. Members in each team use the four basic operations (addition, subtraction, division and multiplication) to compute a simple mathematical equation provided orally by the instructor.
3. They call out the correct answer as soon as possible and a point is given to the team to which he or she belongs.

This game addresses students' listening skills and tests their understanding of numbers, which is often an important part of language at the early stages. And it is good to remember that listening is related to oral speech, so to improve oral communication the students must listen quite well and differentiate numbers as Fourteen from Forty.

Story Time: this is good to remember and also for retelling the story afterwards, although the main procedures are:

1. Participants pick and listen to a tape randomly selected from a provided stack of tapes (the recording contains a spoken excerpt of a well-known children's story, such as the Snow White, the Ginger Bread Man, etc).
2. After listening to the entire excerpt, competitors correctly identify the title of the story from a provided list.

The teacher can vary them with cartoon stories without any sound track so they have to practice the language with their own resources. The recorded stories will lead the students to find a way to represent the story easily as they are all classical bedtime stories for young children and have been translated into most of the major languages worldwide. Students should be familiar with those stories.

Although the idea in this paper is to favor the oral practice, the students can reinforce their knowledge on the use of the language as they can play activities helps them to practice sentences and grammatical and lexical structures while having some fun. Students drag and drop words to finish and form correct grammatical sentences if the teacher prepares them at the given moment of the lesson.

Art Master: this game is perfect to establish a sense of the importance of English prepositions. The procedures are simple:

1. The teacher or a selected student describes a picture orally.
2. Students try to draw the picture with all the details on a sheet of paper, including named objects in accurate positions.

This game reinforces the use of prepositions, such as: in, on, to the right, to the left, in the middle, in front of or next to, etc. It also reinforces the vocabulary of concrete objects that are regularly displayed in a given room which students have already learned before.

*Guess What?* In this exercise the students use cards which can be used for other games in the different lessons to provide students a chance to practice making descriptions of things, places and people in English while learning the English vocabulary. The procedures are as following:

1. Divide the class into teams.
2. Give cards that are only with the related topic of the lesson. It could be animals, fruits at the market, in a restaurant, ect, but the students provide the same amount of items and their orders.
3. Once they are ready ask them to give it to next team, so they compare what they have in common and what they don't, the students go on reading and sending the cards to the next team until everyone has read all the cards, so they have to remember all the items that were repeated in some cards to copy them on the board and select the order of preferences.
4. Finally they can be graded using a scale to see the points they got in their proposed card.

*What's Cooking?* This game can provide the students with a sense of order what comes first and what follows. It is good for memory training as well:

1. Students read a recipe and make the dish using gestures in front of everybody.
2. They have to show the amount of ingredients and the process following exactly the instructions laid out in the recipe and at the end they say the things they have done.

This game not only reinforces food vocabulary or memory retaining, but also it is an excellent way to test the students' ability to comprehend the instructions in order and later to talk about them. This is also good for introducing cross-culture topics and refer to the main dishes Ecuadorians have in the different regions of the country. Recipes may vary depending on what food terms and cultures the teachers wishes to cover. Salads, soups and sandwiches are easy-to-prepare recipes, but they work for the less able students while other dishes can be perfect tasks for the more able students.

Although the use of different games have different purposes in each lesson,

each game is suitable for reinforcing individual language skills as they are easily applied in the classroom and they contribute to help each other to win, to share and to learn. As Uberman (1998, 87) writes, "Games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency and communicative skills. If not for any of these reasons, they should be used just because they help students see beauty in a foreign language and not just problems that at times seem overwhelming."

The observations in the English lessons allow teachers to appreciate the importance of games to use the language communicatively, because games may lead to different results and from those results teachers can analyze the best ways to improve teaching. But the increase in the use of the language is constantly present.

Throughout the use of games, the teachers have observed that students were more engaged in and enthusiastic to using English in the classroom to communicate which serve for practice and for fun. They were attentive to the teachers. In each game, students found their own ways to express themselves as they tried hard their English to win the game.

Finally, there are some games to go over what the teacher have said, or the students have practiced, or there are others that are used to complete the lesson when it goes smoothly and there are some minutes left, so it is good for those cases to have a card hidden in the pocket to be used for such occasions. But the design is free for each teacher and his or her style.

One of these good examples to let the students practice when there is more time to do so is malapropism, but we proposed a variant from the one that is explained by the Oxford Word Game.

It could be suitable for any amount of players and it is good for writing or speaking. The procedure is as follows:

"Malapropism are words or phrases which are used in the wrong context because they are mistaken for similar words. They are named after Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's play *The Rivals* - a character who would say such things as "An allegory on the banks of the Nile" (meaning "an alligator") and "Illiterate him, I say, quite from your memory" (meaning "obliterate"). Mistakes like these are often called howlers, especially if they are made by school children or students.

Used as a game, malapropism can be spoken by one player to another, who has to guess the correct word or phrase. Or you can simply make up malapropisms for your own and other people's enjoyment." (Augarde, 1994:139)

This activity is very productive because the students like to correct their mistakes, both oral and written, so when they are assigned a task to evaluate their classmates' speeches or essays, they find it quite interesting to discover what they know about the language. We use malapropism in this case to let the students correct the mistake in somebody else written or oral communication

using a funny technique for learning. In this case, the examples we have used in our classrooms are simple and easy for beginners, for instance:

When talking about sports they constantly refer to soccer and their favorite players, because soccer is their national sport in Ecuador, but they get confused with football because of the word they have for that in Spanish, so if we say something referring to this and they are wrong, I have taught them to use a similar word instead, and it is sucking a finger like a baby, they sometimes do it with gestures or say the wrong word meaning soccer to let them realize their wrong word selection. When pronouncing a very frequently used word as *very* and they are using a wrong sound they correct their speech using a tag question as *are you bury, aren't you?* So they laugh a lot and learn easily.

Meantime when they are writing something and we ask them to correct their essays; first, we ask to exchange their papers to the next student so that everybody participate, then they are asked to check the other paper and mark the mistakes but at the same time find a word to make the student realize his or her mistake so in the sentence like: *I came home with my parent*, meaning father, the student circles the word *parent* but also writes next to it a word or phrase like the one we got from a very funny student, he wrote pa aren't IMPOSSIBLE.

Another game we can use in our final minutes is a crossword puzzle to remember the vocabulary in a lesson or perhaps in the unit. For instance in the unit dealing with travel essentials, they are introduced words and expressions like shirt, jacket, jeans and shoes, and means of transportation like train ship, car or plane. The teacher can place all those words and phrases together and match one letter from one word to the same letter in the other. For example J can be the same letter for jacket and jeans, and S can be the s in jeans and the same in ship, etc. this exercise can be very brief and funny if it is used for competitions in teams.

### **3. Conclusions**

Our experience using games for our students taught us that games stimulate communicative skills and help them to be open minded and collaborative in the team for practice. Students are relax and feel the necessity to use their English during the activity. The games always give students a natural chance to work together as a team for obtaining a goal and to communicate using English with each other. It is then a great possibility to approach the foreign culture and the language using games that can increase their need for the use of English to interact and win.

Teachers must prepare all the steps in the games he or she prepares to reach the goals of the activity and give the most important rules or procedures to the students. Based on the advantages of games about learning English, teachers must settle down when to use them to get the best results. They could be used during the beginning of the lesson, during the lesson or at the end of the lesson,

and they must be designed to practice the language as an English competition to help students experience the fun and uses of English in different contexts.

For the beginning of the lesson, before the main content is introduced, the teacher can encourage the students to use the language or predict the coming topic while they have fun in the classroom, they should feel the mood of English language before they get into the lesson. For the while lesson activities, when the lesson is clearly focusing in the main objective of the whole lesson, the teacher can also play games as exercises related to the different tasks they have to solve to get the new content introduced, practiced or rehearsed. Finally, at the end of the lesson the teacher can let them remember what has been taught using games that will let them fix all the content that have been analyzed.

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