

THE ADVANTAGES OF USING COMMUNICATION GAMES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Desi Surayatika¹⁾

¹⁾ Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Indo Global Mandiri
Jl. Jend. Sudirman No. 629 KM.4 Palembang Kode Pos 30129
Email : desi@uigm.ac.id¹⁾

ABSTRACT

Games promote learners' interaction. Interaction comprises the nature of classroom pedagogy and classroom behavior. Pair or group work is one of the main ways to increase cooperation. Many games can be played in pairs or in small groups, thereby providing an opportunity to develop their interpersonal skills such as the skill of disagreeing politely or the skill of asking for help. In the classroom learners will definitely participate in the activities. Therefore, in groups or in pairs, they are more willing to ask questions, communicate and discuss topics with their partners and think creatively about how to use foreign language to achieve their goals. The competition in the games gives students a natural opportunity to work together and communicate with each other a lot. Games improve learners' language acquisition. Thanks to the motivation and interaction created by games, students can acquire knowledge faster and more effectively than by other means. Games can stimulate and encourage students to participate in the activity since they naturally want to win. Apart from having fun, students are learning. They acquire a new language. Students begin to realize that they have to use the language if they want others to understand what they are saying. Furthermore, games can lower anxiety. In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better. The meaning of the language students listen to, read, speak and write in will be more vividly experienced in a game and, therefore, they will better remember the language they learn. Games increase learners' achievement. Games can involve all the basic language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and a number of skills are often involved in the same game. Games can motivate learners, promote learners' interaction, and improve learners' acquisition. As a result, games can increase learners' achievement, which means that learners' test results, ability of communication, knowledge of vocabulary, or other language skills can improve.

Key words: Communication Games, Advantages, English

1. Introduction

Language is system of arbitrary symbols which helps the people of a particular community to communicate and to interact (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar, 2011, pp. 35-36). It means that people use language to express their ideas, emotion, and desires through communication. To do so, language is the only thing they need as a medium to interact with one another. According to Crystal (2003, p. 3), a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country. Nowadays, English has been known as a global language which reaches its status due to some reasons. Crystal (2003, pp. 9-10) also lists several possibilities that can affect the position of English in a country. First, the political and military power in which the successful expedition of soldiers and sailors bring about the growth of English. Second, the economical power that affects to the maintaining and expanding of that language. Third, the support of the development of communication technologies which bring a worldwide impact to the spread of English as a global language that can across national boundaries with electromagnetic case. Therefore, English has become the most important language which is widely used by the people in international communication.

Crystal (2003, p. 5) also claims that English now is the language most widely taught as a foreign language – in over 100 countries, such as China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Egypt and Brazil, etc. He further explains that a language can be made a priority in a country's foreign-language teaching, even though this language has no official status. It becomes the language which children are most likely to be taught when they arrive in school (Crystal, 2003, p. 4).

Indonesia as one of the developing countries has also set its educational curriculum to include English as a foreign language which is studied from Elementary School as a local content, Junior High School up to Senior High School as compulsory subject and a complementary subject of higher education institution. It has been taught in order to increase the students' English competence because English has become a crucial factor of being used in international communication in successful life. Almost all Asian countries have set the language as one of the compulsory subjects studied at school. Moreover, English is being used as an instructional language in many formal and non-formal educational institutions.

In another side, Rini (2014) argues that the learning of English at schools and universities will not be much different from what has been going on these years (p.29). The changing of curriculum does not really bring much

difference in the real practice of teaching and learning, because both teachers and students are busy with one goal, namely passing the exam, now the national exam, this is what the teachers are worried about. It is caused what is stated in the curriculum is sometimes different from what is carried out in the classrooms.

Additionally, the fact that the limited time allocation for teaching English at school in the 2013 curriculum which is stated in Permendikbudno. 70 (2013 p. 12). Here, English subject is only allocated for two hours per week and the length for every hour is only 45 minutes. It is different from the KTSP curriculum that allocates English subject for four hours per week. It means that the time allocation is reduced from the previous time allocation. This surely brings about several consequences for language teaching and learning process in Indonesia. It will be a big challenge for both teacher and students to work harder in achieving the learning goal in a limited time.

Based on Kemendikbud (2014, pp. 43-53), the process of English teaching and learning in the 2013 curriculum is clearly to reinforce the language competence as means of communication to convey the ideas and knowledge. In line, Nur and Madkur (2014, p. 126) also point out the final goal of English teaching is the development of communicative competence in the English language. Regarding to those statements, it means the teacher and students are expected to build or create the meaningfulness circumstance where all of the participants are engaged in real life communication or in other words are full of speaking activity. Yet, all of English skills should be integrated one another in every meeting.

The students are expected to be able to communicate English well (Depdiknas, 2006, p. 305). Because of this reason, often parents undoubtedly spend amount of their money only to ensure that their children have gotten a good English program since they were in Elementary School. In relation to the education quality, the study of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) in 2012 shows that Indonesian students had low quality. The report of this database shows that the rank of Indonesian students' achievement is 64 out of 65 countries. The average score of Indonesian students in some aspects such as mathematic is 375, reading 396, and science is 382 whereas the average score of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as whole is 494 for math, 496 for reading, and 501 for science (OECD, 2014, p. 5). If we regard to this condition that Indonesian students are still lack of critical, analytic, and procedural competences. It means, their competences are under the average and they are still far from successful educators.

Being successful students are not easy. Many students have been studying English for more than years, but they are still unable to use English in interacting with their teacher in the classroom or with others outside the classroom. Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar, (2011) state that language learners who lack of confidence in their ability to participate successfully in oral interaction often listen

in silence while others do the talking. He also identifies the problems that are being faced by language learners in a conversation are sometimes too shy and embarrassed to speak. It happens when they do not understand what others say or when they realize that a conversation partner has not understood them.

It is supported by Harmer (2007, pp. 345-348) who reveals some important points related to the teaching of speaking namely the reluctance of the students to speak and take part. The students are reluctant to speak English because they are shy and are not predisposed to express themselves in front of other people, especially when they are being asked to give personal information or opinions. Frequently, too, there is a worry about speaking badly and losing face in front of their classmates.

In addition, there are some factors that hinder the implementation of English learning in the class, including (1) students' fatigue, (2) students' saturation, and (3) students' dislike of physical activities (Hikmah, 2013, p. 205). These factors will affect students' behavior in the class that they will be lazy and not serious to learn, reluctant to complete the task given by teacher, and playing around the class. Some students faced difficulties in English. One of the problems faced by the students is they liked to use their native language (vernacular language) more than English in the teaching and learning process. Then, they could not communicate actively and spontaneously with others although they have enough ideas. It is caused they were too afraid of getting embarrassed and making mistakes in expressing their ideas. Sometimes, when they did not know how to express their ideas and feeling and what should they say then it was because they lack of vocabulary in English. They did not know how to start and respond in the conversation. Therefore, the students could not improve their conversation into great communication.

Communication game consists of two content words; 'communication' and 'game'. Communication is defined as an activity of expressing idea and feelings or an activity of giving people information (Oxford Dictionary, 4th Ed, p. 84). Meanwhile, game is defined as an activity that is entertaining, engaging, often challenging for learners in which the learner plays and interacts with others (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2006, p. 1).

If both words are combined into one, communication game is defined as a set of activity that is designed to help students learning English in element of fun or with joyful activity and is aimed to get learners to communicate or talk as much and fluently as possible. Games help the students not only to see the problems of the foreign language itself but also to see the beauty in learning that language. Thus, it could be said that game is a joyful activity that is encouraging and entertaining for students to stimulate and develop their interest and also to reduce their frustration in learning speaking.

A. Literature Review

Games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. Even though

games are often associated with fun, we should not lose sight of their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching and learning. Games are effective as they create motivation, lower students' stress, and give language learners the opportunity for real communication. Games are considered as the effective activity to be used in teaching and learning process. It does not only make students feel fun and learn with pleasant, but also it motivates and builds students social interaction among student (McDonough & Shaw, 1993, p. 163). Games provide one way of helping the learners to experience language rather than merely study it (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2006, p. 2). In line, Leon and Cely (2010, p. 16-23) also state that games are motivating and exciting experiences for students to develop their speaking skills in a fun and comfortable way. It is an activity of sport involving skill, knowledge or chance in which a person follows fixed rules and tries to win against an opponent.

Hadfield (1990) mentions that there are two kinds of games; *Competitive games* in which players or teams race to be the first to reach the goal and *Co-operative game* in which players or teams work together towards a common goal. Various types of communication games can be included in teaching to stimulate students' talking and involvement in the classroom interactive communication. Here Hadfield (1990) states some types of communication games, such as;

B. Information Gap Activities

In information gap activities, one student has access to some information that another student does not know. Here, he or she must find or know that piece of information to complete a task successfully. In another word, the student must find the gap of information that another student has or know. Or, both students have information that they must gather to solve a problem. This type of games can be played in pairs, or in small groups where each member has some information.

C. Guessing Games

Guessing games are not much different from information gap activities, and it may be one of its variants. In this game, the student who has the information does not reveal it, while other students or players guess what this information might be. Here, the student must guess something by asking some questions related to the information hidden.

D. Matching Games

They are activities in which students match pairs of similar cards, pictures or information with others to solve the problem. This kind of games can be played either as a whole class activity where students keep calculating until they find a partner with a corresponding card or picture; or as a pair work or small group activity where learners choose cards or pictures from a selection, and match them by their partners from the same selection.

E. Search Games

This game may also be a variant of information gap game. It is a game in which every student in the class has a one particular piece of information. Players must gather as much as possible information to fill in a questionnaire or to solve a particular problem. Thus, each student is at the same time a giver and a collector of information.

F. Board Games and Card Games

They are very common and familiar games in which the aim is round the board. Players can start by gathering most cards, or get rid of unnecessary cards first. The cards and squares exposed on the board are used for motivating students to communicate.

G. Combining Games or Arranging Games

Combining games or arranging games are also called sequencing games. In these games, players arrange themselves in groups such as families or a group of people spending holidays, and act on a certain information. In other words, learners act on particular information in order to arrange items such as picture cards, events in a narrative, or players themselves in a specific order.

H. Exchanging and Collecting Games

Exchanging and Collecting games are activities based on 'barter' principle. In these games, students exchange ideas, articles, or cards in order to make a satisfactory exchange to both sides. Exchanging and collecting games can be played as a whole class activity where students exchange and calculate cards or articles at random; or an inter-group activity in which every small group collect a set of cards or articles, and then exchange them with other groups.

Besides, according to Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1997, p. 211), there are several types of games:

a) Picture Games

A picture game is a game in which the use of pictures plays a major part. In this games involve comparing and contrasting pictures, considering differences or similarities, considering possible relationship between pictures.

b) Guessing and Speculating Games

In guessing and speculating game, the learner is challenged to identify something which is difficult to identify or to hypothesize about something which is then compared with the facts. Here, it might be someone knows something and the others must find out what it is.

c) Memory Games

Essentially, these games challenge the player's ability to remember. The inevitable differences between what players remember lead to discussion, in which opinion and information are exchanged.

d) *Word Games*

This game focus of intentions is initially on the word rather than the sentence: spelling, meanings, words for sentence-making, words as inferred from contexts, or words as categorized according to grammatical usage. However, learners are required in many cases to go beyond the initial focus and to communicate in full sentences, sometimes to pursue ideas and argue at some length.

- e) *Caring and Sharing Games* All the games in this section demand encourage trust and interest in others in which the learner feels comfortable while sharing personal information with other learners. These games relate more to invitation than to challenge. The difficulty of these games is learners' shyness or reluctance to share personal feelings and experience with other class members. Only the teacher can decide how and when to make the attempt to introduce the learners to caring and sharing activities. Therefore, some games that were used by the researcher were information gap activity, guessing games and matching games. Naturally, these games have same characteristics. First, the use of pictures played a major part in this activity. Here, the researcher used the pictures as the media. It involved comparing and contrasting picture, considering differences and similarities and possible relationship between pictures. Second, the essential activity in these games was to find the information by questioning and answering. There were some students who asked some questions and the others responded by giving the answer. The last, these kinds of games also could be played in pairs or in small groups.

2. Result

A. Implementation of Communication Games in Teaching English as Foreign Language

Communication games theoretically have been a bit explained in previous point. These games are supposed to be useful for teacher in encouraging students to be more successful language learner especially in speaking. In communication games, the teacher gives materials such as expressions, vocabulary, pictures, and other media which are enable learners to expose their English through the activities.

For instance, television and radio games or sometimes called as information gap activity, it is a grouping or team work activity in which the students are divided into several groups. Each team has to ask "yes/no question" to the chairperson from the other team who think of an object that should be guessed by the other team by asking about maximum 20 questions. For the team that answers correctly in fewer will get points. Here, the student has to find out what the object that is being imagined by the chairperson through some questions that they ask to. By using the target language but in the simple form of sentence with the correct structure, they will learn and try to practice their English

in speaking class without anxious or any force but in a joyful and comfortable way.

In these games the learners might make mistakes in the use of the language. As a general principle, it is better not to interrupt the speaker but to wait until he or she has finished before first responding to the content, and only then pointing out a mistake in the formal use of the language, if you think it necessary to do so. Sometimes, within the activity students get lost or cannot think of what to say causing the lost of idea the teacher expected for them. Therefore, it is teacher's role to help them by giving some suggestions in order to make students will not feel dead end of idea and language. Good materials would be useless without any cooperative work among others (learner, teacher, and activities).

B. Advantages of Games in Teaching Speaking

It has been proved by many scholars that communication games and language games in general have a great importance in facilitating language teaching. They are not just activities to which learners are exposed for entertainment or passing the time, but they are main activities for language teaching.

Martinson and Chu (2008, p. 478) draw games as effective tools for learning because they offer students a hypothetical environment in which they can explore alternative decisions without the risk of failure. In games, thought and action are also combined into purposeful behavior to accomplish a goal. Thus, playing games teaches us how to strategize, to consider alternatives, and to think flexibly.

Games allow the students to work as a team and to work collaboratively towards a common goal. This collaborative effort is more than just learning to work with others. It promotes a symbiotic relationship where they can learn from each other. Students must supply reasons for why their answer is the best, listen to their teammates' rationale and then determine which answer is the best and why.

According to Hadfield (1998), a game is an activity with rules, a goal and element of fun (p.4). Similarly, Harmer states; "Games are a vital part of a teacher's equipment, not only for language practice they provide, but also for the therapeutic effect they have. They can be used at any stage of a class to provide an amusing and challenging respite from other classroom activity and are especially useful at the end of a long day to send students away feeling cheerful about their English class". (Harmer, 1991, p.101). Games can be the media to teach English as foreign language for some reasons. According to Wright, Bitteridge, and Buckby(1997), "games can be found to give practice in all the skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), and for many types of communications (e.g. encouraging, criticizing, agreeing, explaining)" (p.1).

In addition, Wright, Betteridge and Buckby(2006) also mentions some advantages of games. First, games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. It helps them to overcome their

boredom in learning. Second, games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language because it provides one way of helping the learners to experience language rather than merely study it. In view of language learning as hard work that students have to effort to understand and repeat the lesson accurately. Third, many games similarly provide repeated occurrence and use of a particular language form or use of specific language structures. If language conveys information and opinion, then games provide the key features of 'drill' with the added opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication. The last then games must be regarded as central to a language teacher's repertoire and not merely a way of passing the time (p.2).

3. Conclusion

Games can encourage the students to express their opinions and feelings freely in a joyful activity in which the students interact with others to practice more their English through games activities. First, the students were more confident to speak in English although many students still read notes or doing memorization, but they were not hesitant and were fluent enough to describe about people. It was because they were accustomed to use English during the implementation of the technique. By using games, they learnt and tried to practice their English in speaking class without any anxiety or force but in a joyful and comfortable way. It was supported by Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2006) who stated that games provide the key features of 'drill' with the added opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication (p. 2). The researcher inferred that the more they practiced, the more confident they would be. It might be because in every meeting, the researcher always asked the students to practice to communicate with other by asking question and giving the response in games activity. As we know, speaking activities should provide rehearsal opportunity – chance to practice real life speaking in the safety of classroom (Harmer, 2007, p. 123). Therefore, the researcher together with the students discussed about the material that would be learned at the beginning of that meeting such as the vocabulary and expression needed. After that, the students continued to practice and apply it in the learning process.

Besides, they were also actively engaged in the learning process. Harmer claimed that one of activities and materials which frequently engage students include: games (depending on the age of the learners and the type of game). Actually, when applying the games the students indirectly were being forced to speak but they did not realized because they were too excited in doing this activity. The researcher assumed that it might be because the games activity that was implemented in the class was entertaining and also challenging for them. The activity by using games was not boring but full of joy as Wright's (2006, p.2) statement that "Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work. It helps them to overcome their boredom in

learning". No wonder, the students finally participated in the learning process with no worry in making mistakes or in getting embarrassed in front of their friends. Moreover, *games can improve learners' language acquisition*. Thanks to the motivation and interaction created by games, students can acquire knowledge faster and more effectively than by other means. Games can stimulate and encourage students to participate in the activity since they naturally want to win. Apart from having fun, students are learning. They acquire a new language. Students begin to realize that they have to use the language if they want others to understand what they are saying. Furthermore, games can lower anxiety. In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better. The meaning of the language students listen to, read, speak and write in will be more vividly experienced in a game and, therefore, they will better remember the language they learn. *Games increase learners' achievement*. Games can involve all the basic language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and a number of skills are often involved in the same game. Games can motivate learners, promote learners' interaction, and improve learners' acquisition. As a result, games can increase learners' achievement, which means that learners' test results, ability of communication, knowledge of vocabulary, or other language skills can improve.

Additionally, the implementation of games in the class also had built students' intimate relationship among each others. The students had to work as a team and to work collaboratively towards a common goal. They shared everything among each others. This collaborative effort was more than just learning to work with others. It promoted a symbiotic relationship where they could learn from each other. Thus, playing games teaches them how to strategize, consider alternatives and think flexibly (Martinson & Chu, 2008, p. 478).

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