THE MAJOR CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE WHEN INTEGRATING GAMES INTO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract
Teaching English to young learners using games is a promising approach to engage and motivate students. However, teachers encounter various challenges when incorporating games into their teaching practices. This article explores the major challenges faced by teachers when using games to teach English to young learners. The review identifies time-related challenges, classroom management difficulties, material and resource limitations, and instructional challenges. Potential solutions to these challenges are also discussed. The implications of the findings highlight the importance of understanding context-specific challenges and further research in this area. Overall, while games offer valuable benefits in teaching English to young learners, addressing and overcoming the challenges is essential for successful integration.

Keywords: teaching English, games, challenges, motivation, engagement, solutions, game-based teaching

Introduction

Teaching young learners is a challenging task, as it requires for teachers to have a deep understanding of learners' imaginative and playful nature, as well as the ability to effectively use English as the language of instruction (Kusmaryati, 2020). Nunnan (2011) addresses the following factors that may pose challenges in teaching young learners:

- Cognitive development. As young learners undergo difficult developmental changes, it is important to consider their psychological and social characteristics when designing tasks and materials. By recognizing the individual characteristics of their learners, teachers can develop effective and engaging materials to support learners' growth and development;

- Motivation. Motivation may decline over time when the learning objectives are unclear and when learners feel language learning is not relevant to their daily lives or interests.
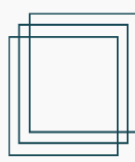
- Attention. Young learners have a limited ability to concentrate and focus for extended periods of time. This means that they become bored or disengaged if they are asked to do same activity for too long. It is important for teachers to come up with a variety of activities to prevent boredom;

- Multi-level groups. Diversity encompasses a broad range of factors that influence the learning process, aptitude, attitude, as well as various learning strategies and styles, cognitive approaches and more. It is important for teachers to consider them while planning a lesson;

- Assessment. Assessment is an essential part of the learning process, allowing teachers to measure students' process, identify weaknesses and strengths, and adjust instruction accordingly. Teachers should see assessment as an integral part of the learning progress (Nunnan, 2011).

Teachers are always looking for new and creative ways to make the learning process more engaging and interesting to young learners. Games can be a valuable tool in achieving this goal, as they offer opportunities for young learners to practice and apply language skills in an enjoyable way. The concept that young learners are more adept at acquiring knowledge at a faster pace compared to adults is often associated with the use of games as a pedagogical strategy in the teaching and learning process (Adrhianto, 2017).

According to Sigurðardóttir (2010), teachers believe that games are an effective tool for teaching English to young learners, as they recognize that children have short attention span. This perceived level of effectiveness can be attributed to the fact that teachers understand the characteristics of young children as learners. In his study, Sigurðardóttir (2010) mentions following advantages of games:

- games encourage creativity and spontaneous use of language;
- games are fun;
- games help learners to build relationships and feel equal;
- games provide valuable practice for using a language in real-life situations;
- games give students more active role;
- games facilitate a receptive and open mindset;
- positive emotions, such as happiness and excitement, create favorable learning environment;
- games provide comfortable setting.

Despite the benefits, teachers may encounter several challenges when incorporating games into the teaching process. This literature review aims to provide insights into the nature of these challenges. This review will also identify potential strategies that can help overcome these challenges, providing valuable information for teachers who wish to insert games in their teaching practices.

The literature review, therefore, will address the question: "What are the major challenges that teachers face when using games to teach English to young learners?"

Methodology

To conduct a literature review, the systematic literature review methodology suggested by Xio & Watson (2019) will be used, providing an overview of the current state of the literature pertaining to a specific research question. Google Scholar database will be used to search for relevant articles. The research criteria will be limited to studies and articles published between the years from 2010 to 2023.

Literature Review

The study conducted by Wang (2010) investigated the use of communicative language games as a tool for teaching and learning English in Taiwanese primary schools. The study involved 150 teachers who were currently teaching in primary schools in Taiwan. The findings of the study showed that the majority of teachers appreciated the benefits and value of communicative game activities in teaching English. The survey was carried out to find out what the teachers see as a challenge while employing games in their teaching process. The results indicated that the size of the classroom setting was identified as a major obstacle by the teachers. In cooperative and active learning lessons, students are typically encouraged to move around the classroom. Due to the small size of classrooms in Taiwan, teachers and students struggle to move around the classroom freely during a game, making the classroom setting a major challenge (Wang, 2010). The amount of time needed to prepare games and the lack of materials in textbooks to adapt games into the curriculum pose as a problem for half of teachers. However, these opinions are not strongly held, as the other half of teachers did not consider these issues as challenges. Surprisingly, the majority of teachers disagreed that playing games in class would result discipline problems.

Another research carried out by Yolageldili & Arikan (2011) collected opinions from 15 English language primary school teachers through a questionnaire to find out the effectiveness of teaching grammar with the help of games. The findings reveal that the majority of teachers found it challenging to identify appropriate games for all aspects of grammar. Moreover, teachers expressed discomfort when using games instead of explicitly teaching grammar rules. It is interesting to note that teachers did not find games to be a distraction for students' attention, nor did they find them to be time-consuming.

Ardhianto (2017) examined the types of games used by teachers to educate young learners, as well as the difficulties teachers face. The interview was held with two kindergarten teachers. Three types of challenges were determined. Managing classroom control during game-based learning was identified as challenging, because young learners tend to be highly active and enthusiastic, often requiring movement in the classroom. Another challenge identified was maintaining students' motivation and mood during a game.
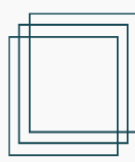
Teachers believed that some students may be unwell or uninterested, which can affect the enthusiasm of their peers as children tend to imitate their classmates' actions. As most of the language learners are 3 and 4 years old, the educators struggled to explain the rules of the game to them, which lead to children playing game without a clear understanding of the rules.

Diana (2010) in her project discussed the benefits and drawbacks of games in teaching vocabulary to third-grade students in elementary school. The researcher conducted a classroom observation to observe the teaching process that involved the use of games. Upon observation, she noticed that students became very excited and enthusiastic to participate in the game, which resulted in a noisy classroom environment. It was difficult for the teacher to maintain control over the class. Moreover, the use of game took up a significant amount of time, leaving the teacher with limited time to explain the material in depth.

Korkmaz (2012) formed a questionnaire to gather information on the perceptions of both young learners and teachers towards learning with the help of games. The questionnaire was distributed to a total of 60 primary school teachers and 121 primary school learners who then completed survey. In the questionnaire used for study, participants were asked about possible issues they faced during a game. The main concerns identified were noise, the use of learners' native language (L1) during gameplay, and the impact of exam-oriented education system. While the majority of learners reported that noise did not bother them while playing games, over two-thirds of them admitted to speaking Turkish (their native language) during gameplay. This can pose a challenge for teachers, because learners may lose focus on the main objective of using games as a learning tool, which is to improve their English language skills. The study also found out that a significant number of learners felt that they did not have enough time to prepare for exams when they learned English through games. This may also present a challenge for teachers, as passing an exam plays a crucial role in educational system of Turkey (Korkmaz, 2012).

Another study conducted in Singapore by Koh et al. (2012) identified several problems encountered in teacher's attempts to adapt games. According to the results of the study, the highest rated reason why teachers do not employ educational games in their teaching is the lack of time to incorporate them into the curriculum. Teachers may feel that they have limited time to cover the necessary curriculum material and that using games may be time-consuming. Moreover, teachers reported that they found it difficult to find suitable games to integrate into their curriculum. Limited resources were another obstacle that participants faced. They found that they had inadequate resources, such as computers, tablets, and other technological devices needed to effectively incorporate games into their teaching.
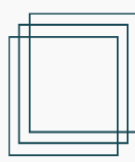
Karadag (2015) explored the perceptions of pre-service teachers on the use of games in a primary reading and writing instruction course. A questionnaire from 189 pre-service primary schools teachers was collected. According to the findings, the most common difficulty reported was a teacher feeling nervous about their ability to create an authentic game that is both engaging and educational for their students. This can stem from a lack of experience or knowledge in game design or uncertainty about how to integrate educational content into a game effectively. Another challenge identified was teachers not having enough time to prepare a game for the lesson.

Discussion

According to the studies mentioned above, the following challenges were identified:
- Small size of the classroom
- The lack of time needed for preparation of games
- The lack of materials in textbooks to adapt a game into the curriculum
- Difficulties in finding an appropriate game
- Difficulties in managing classroom
- Difficulties in maintaining students' motivation
- Difficulty in explaining the rules of the game to children
- The use of L1
- Limited resources
- The lack of knowledge in game design

These studies can be categorized around four main areas:
- Time-related;
- Classroom management;
- Materials and resource related;
- Instructional challenges.

Possible solutions to the challenges

As educators have to cover a wide range of topics within a limited period, they often may find it challenging to allocate sufficient time for games. One possible solution to this issue is to select games that align with the lessons objectives and can be played within a shorter timeframe. In addition, it can be helpful for teachers to set time limit for a game.

When it comes to managing discipline problems, teachers can utilize non-verbal signals to control the noise level of the class (Wang, 2010). For instance, a teacher may raise their hand or use a visual cue such as holding up a stop sign or a quiet sign to indicate to the students that they need to lower their voices or stop talking. One of the challenges identified is the difficulty in finding suitable materials in textbooks that can be used for games.
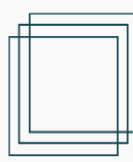
As a result, teachers have to spend a significant amount of their time in preparing for games, which can be time-consuming. It can be solved by addressing the problem to material developers. They in turn can incorporate game design principles into the textbooks to create a more engaging and interactive learning experience for students. Furthermore, it is beneficial for teachers to store the game-based learning activities they have used in their lessons for future use. By storing and organizing these activities, teachers can easily retrieve and reuse them, thereby reducing their workload.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to identify the major challenges teachers come across while employing games as a method of teaching English to young learners. As a result, the review highlighted a number of challenges and presented potential solutions to overcome them. It is apparent from the review that the most significant obstacles that teachers face include insufficient time, the lack of materials in textbooks to adapt games into the curriculum, difficulty in managing the classroom effectively and instructional challenges. In summary, using games as a teaching tool is an effective way to enhance the learning experience of young learners. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the challenges to integrate games into the teaching process successfully.

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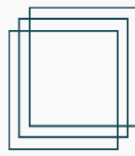
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