USING GAMES IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR STUDENTS IN SPEAKING CLASSES

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ABSTRACT:

The use of language games in foreign language teaching is one of the effective methods that can increase students' motivation to learn. They help and encourage students to maintain their learning and interest in learning. Additionally, they assist teachers in creating contexts where language practice is very useful and understandable for learners. In this article, we will discuss the application of specific language games in teaching English in general and teaching English speaking skills in particular to develop communication skills for students. Furthermore, we provide some useful suggestions for teachers to apply these games most effectively.

Keywords: Language games, communication skills, speaking classes, motivation, learning interest

Introduction :

In the current trend of globalization, now more than ever, English is seen as the most common language, serving as a particularly useful means for communication, economic exchange, cultural exchange, etc., worldwide. According to modern teaching methods, learning a foreign language involves the integration of various skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Among these, speaking skills are considered the most important because the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is the ability to communicate. Based on this reality, the following initiative is undertaken:

To create communicative contexts and foster learning interest, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and developing communication skills for students in oral classes.

To propose specific language games suitable for each lesson unit and an efficient implementation process for these games.

Methodology :

Subjects of the study:

The subject of the study is 109 English non-major students at their first year in a university in Hanoi, divided into 2 classes.

Research method:

Research design:

Using experimental research methods (pre- and post-comparison of improvement; comparison of communication effectiveness between the intervention group and the control group during regular class hours).

According to Lee (2009), language games in foreign language teaching help dispel fatigue and boredom, bringing about a lively learning atmosphere and stimulating students' interest automatically. Additionally, these games help integrate the language into real life through specific communicative situations and contexts. George P. McCallum (101 Word Game: 2010) suggests that appropriately designed, selected, and used language games help:

- Focus students' attention on specific grammar structures and vocabulary units.
- Reinforce, review, and enrich language knowledge.
- Increase students' motivation to learn.
- Promote a learner-centered teaching approach.
- Enhance equal participation between high-achieving and low-achieving students.

- Create a fun learning environment with healthy competition and creativity, minimizing stress and allowing language use to occur naturally.
- Provide quick and effective feedback to teachers.
- Ensure maximum student engagement in the learning process.

Data Collection Method:

- Using pre and post-experiment surveys.
- Using students' answer sheets for the questionnaires.

Data Processing Method:

Data will be processed and analyzed using SPSS 18.0 software with statistical algorithms.

Initiative Content:

Applying language games in teaching speaking skills for students.

Language games can be applied in teaching all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Different games are selected and applied for each skill to ensure the best language development goals. In this initiative, the author selects, designs, and applies games to support speaking skill development in various stages: Warm-ups, Pre-speaking stage, While-speaking stage, and Post-speaking stage according to the specific topics and content of each lesson unit in the coursebook English File – elementary level.

Warm-up Stage:

Games in this stage are usually short and fun to prepare and direct students' thoughts to the topic content. The time spent on this activity should only last about 5 minutes.

Unit 5: Matching game

Unit 7: Places: Sorting, ordering games

Pre-speaking Stage:

The games in this stage aim to provide students with the essential language materials needed for the speaking lesson. It is also the stage where students form and organize ideas to facilitate easier and more effective speaking.

Unit 9: Survivors: Crossword

Unit 12: Health: Jumbled words

While-speaking Stage:

This is the main part of each speaking lesson. Students use the prepared language materials to speak, discuss, or present on a specific topic. This stage typically lasts from 15 to 20 minutes.

Unit 4: Work and play: Guessing games

Unit 5; Unit 7; Unit 13: Chain games

Unit 10: Travel: Role-play

Unit 14: Have you ever?: Find someone who

Post-speaking Stage:

This is the final stage of the speaking lesson, often referred to as the "product" or the learning outcome of students. Activities in this stage help students recap and reinforce the lesson content and usually last from 8 to 10 minutes.

Unit 11: Describing people: Guessing games

Unit 13: Winners: Whispering Game

Research results :

	Criteria	Details	Degree of achievement (average) - %	
			Control group	**Intervention group**
1	Fluency and coherence	-Cannot speak	19.5	8.0
		-Hesitant, confused, stuttering	39	21
		-Expresses ideas but speaks slowly	24.5	43.5

		-Speaks naturally, easy to understand, not hesitant	11.4	19.4
		-Fluent, stays on topic		
			4.9	8.0
2	Lexical resources	-Uses incorrect words	31	19
		-Only uses simple, short words	35	26
		-Clearly expresses ideas and uses precise words.	18	29
		-Knows how to use synonyms/antonyms		
		-Uses words flexibly	12.9	17.5
			3.2	8.2
3	Grammatical Range and Accuracy	-Uses incorrect basic grammar structures	30.1	16
		-Expresses ideas in a difficult-to-understand way, not staying on topic	9.7	6.5
		-Can only express short sentences, with prompts		
		-Uses correct grammar at a basic level.		
		-Can use long sentences, complex sentences, and sentence linking	31.5	29
			26	41
			3.5	8
4	Pronunciation	-Mispronounces words	49.5	29
		-Pronounces words correctly but doesn't stress syllables correctly	42.7	53
		-Clear pronunciation, easy to understand 8.2 14.5	8.0	14.7
		-Pronunciation has stress and intonation	0	3.3

Discussion:

At the end of the semester, students' academic results are evaluated through two forms: multiple-choice tests on the computer and question-and-answer sessions. For the Q&A test, each student is randomly selected (by drawing lots) one test paper on the topics covered in the program. Each test paper consists of two parts: Q&A and presentation on the topic. Teachers grade based on agreed criteria.

From the summary table of students' speaking skills test results, it shows:

Criterion 1: The number of students who cannot speak or hesitate, repeat words or sentences in the control group is 19.5% and 39%, respectively. In the intervention group, it is 8.0% and 21%. Although speaking slowly, students managed to express themselves in the intervention group by 43.5%, higher than the control group by 19%. The number of students speaking naturally, fluently, and focusing correctly in the control group accounts for 11.4%, and in the intervention group is 19.4%.

Criterion 2: The majority of students in the control group use incorrect words or only use simple, short, and familiar words, accounting for 31% and 35%, respectively, while in the intervention group, it is lower, accounting for 19% and 26%. The number of students who can express ideas clearly and use correct words, a wide range of vocabulary, and explain clearly and know how to use synonyms, antonyms in the intervention group is higher than the control group by 20.3%.

Criterion 3: In the intervention group, the number of students using incorrect basic grammar structures or only being able to express short sentences when prompted decreases significantly. The number of students who can speak using correct grammar at a simple level increases (41%).

Criterion 4: In the control group, the number of students with pronunciation errors or incorrect stress is 49.5% and 42.7%. The number of students with pronunciation errors decreases in the intervention group; however, the number of students with incorrect stress remains unchanged.
This indicates that when given the opportunity to practice, students practice together and have the ability to correct their pronunciation errors themselves, but the correct stress when pronouncing words or speaking correctly is not yet improved.
Clearly, incorporating games into speaking classes creates a healthy learning environment where students practice together, identify mistakes, and correct them. Both strong and weak students can learn from and support each other to achieve the best learning outcomes. Furthermore, during game participation, the competition between players and teams is a strong motivator for learning, encouraging active participation and limiting the shyness or embarrassment of some students. This is the most important reason why most students become interested and engaged in games. As a result, it brings encouraging effectiveness in improving students' communication skills.

Conclusion :

With carefully designed games that align with the content of each lesson unit in the curriculum and specific, clear procedures and steps, language games can easily be applied in teaching speaking skills to all students across the university for English communication courses. These games contribute to making foreign language classes, which are typically tense and dull, more engaging, creating a lively learning atmosphere and a comfortable, enjoyable, and relaxed communication environment, enhancing and sustaining students' interest in learning. At the same time, they increase students' motivation to learn, encouraging active participation in learning activities.

Language games help to concretize dry vocabulary units, complex grammar structures, or difficult speaking topics, making lesson materials simpler, more relevant, and closer to real-life situations, facilitating students' practice and memorization. Moreover, in the process of applying games, teachers only play the role of guides, monitoring students' learning activities. At this point, students are at the center of teaching and learning activities, so the application of games contributes to promoting students' positive, proactive, and creative attitudes in the learning process, in line with the spirit of the new teaching method - learner-centered teaching.

This initiative is not only suitable for teaching and learning speaking skills but can also be applied to teaching and learning other skills such as listening and writing, or in effectively memorizing grammar structures and vocabulary.

The conditions for applying the initiative successfully include:

- Game content
- Game organization
- Providing points and healthy competition
- Game instructions
- Participant engagement
- Playtime

Evaluating the expected benefits of implementing the initiative according to the author's opinion:

For teachers: This is an opportunity for teachers to apply, refine, and coordinate teaching methods to improve the quality of teaching and learning. At the same time, it allows them to draw experiences during the implementation process to bring about high effectiveness in teaching, helping learners to easily absorb and apply languages in practical situations.

For learners: Implementing this initiative creates a comfortable communication environment and learning atmosphere, helping learners to absorb and grasp knowledge easily.

For Departments and Schools: Enriching and diversifying teaching methods to meet the increasing demands of learners. Contribute to building movements for good teaching, good learning, scientific research, and applying new improvement initiatives to teaching, focusing on the mission of placing learners at the center of education.

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