A Study of Application of Games in Children English Teaching—Taking Children English Class in Education First Training School for Example

REN Lu-lu

Ningbo Dahongying University, Ningbo, China

As a teaching aid, games are vital to facilitate every part in learning process. They are easy to arouse learners' attention and are accessible to achieve teaching objectives compared with traditional teaching. The author did two-month classroom observations in Education First Training School in Ningbo. This paper discusses and shares useful and effective games provided in English class.

Keywords: games, children, English teaching, Education First Training School

Introduction

Throughout the development of children, games play an indispensable role in contrast to education in their daily life. Children's emotional and intellectual growth is supposed to be accompanied with games, such as Eagle & Chicken, Handkerchief, etc. It engages people in making learning fun, motivates a desire for children to communicate, and creates unpredictability about their potentials. What is more, games also have been widely recognized as an important tool in many fields, including sporting class, music class, and second language acquisition. Gaming is becoming a new form of interactive content, worthy of exploration and the process just confirms the remark "interest is the best teacher".

The 21st century places new demands on student learning, then a new combination between games and teaching has been on a burgeoning stage for educators, especially in English class, which is called "game-based learning". As the name suggests, this teaching method is built on the hypothesis that games are the key classroom managements which make lessons more vivid and children more concentrated. It stresses extensive practices in a rewarding language context so that a very enjoyable and educational environment will be created at a primary level, particularly in second language acquisition for children.

Under this condition, game-based learning (GBL) has been highly developed in Western countries, such scholars as Joanne E. Oppenheim (1984) held the idea that play is by its very nature educational. And it should be pleasurable. When the fun goes out of play, most often so does the learning. On the other hand, in China, because of the impact of the traditional teaching methodology and the lack of substantial experience about game-based teaching, the long history of the research on it seems not enough to achieve the expected goal. Game-based learning cannot be used appropriately or its powerful potentials are not motivated. It has not been massively applied in the public school; however, in some institutions of English Education, like Education First,

REN Lu-lu, English Education, Ningbo Dahongying University.

games have been adopted in English teaching by foreign teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to do much further studies on how to improve the effectiveness of game-based learning and to make it become widely and correctly used in China.

Education First was founded by Bertil Hult who devotes to language learning and sticks to developing children possess abilities like critical thinking, collaboration skill, and creative thinking. They have their own teaching system to guarantee students learn simon-pure English. As a trainee at Education First School, the author observed and took the track records of the class, also sorted different interesting games that some experienced teachers often use. Those games can be easily used in classroom without PPT and attract children immediately. The study aims to analyze and share the effective ways of implementing game-based learning in children English teaching in China.

Some Researches About Game-Based Learning

Games have a long-term influence on babies for fun; it also engages in all kinds of occasions later. The earliest notion about edutainment was raised by Plato (407 B.C.). He said that childhood without games was not intact; to some extent, games played a significant role in children's life and the relationships between them were indivisible and indestructible. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1750), a well-known educator, also said it was natural power to make children behave like children; games were their tools to get touch with others and the world. It was a must for them to live in an age of innocence and happiness. Many years have passed since then, the truth never changes and people have gained lots of teaching experiences to prove they were always right. Learning is a cycle of probing into the world, and games are accelerators to speed up the process. Game-based learning is just like pedagogical devices in Western country; they even have their own systems about gaming forms. Susan Boyle (2011) believed the number of game frames or models is extensive, so no matter what discipline you teach in, there must be a game model you can use. With such a magical enchantment, Carlo Perrotta, Gill Featherstone, Helen Aston, and Emily Houghton (2013) also found the principles and mechanisms of game-based learning. They argued firstly educators were supposed to set a clear but challenging goal and gave a fictional setting or "fantasy"; then provided students with plenty of interactions and high degree of students' control. At last, educators should get an immediate and constructive feedback as well as share experience to social bonds. To sum up, games have the potential to bring play back to the learning experience. Westerners have completely integrated games with almost all subjects.

In China, there has been a long history in applying game-basing teaching. XUN Zi and ZHU Xi, who played decisive parts in Chinese education, all put forward some significant ideas about gaming teaching. However, on the contrary, Chinese students do not get the hang of true essence in the modern life. Although games can provide effective learning environment, not all games are effective, nor are all games educational. Similarly, not all games are good for all learners or can create all learning outcomes. Some representative studies are as follows.

ZHU Lin (2014) pointed out that due to parents' expectations on children being enrolled in key elementary schools and the developmental needs of kindergartens themselves, it had been popularized to carry out preschool English education in kindergartens in China. Given children's physical and mental characteristics and preschool English teaching aims, games are the most suitable teaching means. She also expressed that the approach of game teaching functions better in improving children's English speaking and listening than the traditional teaching method. ZHANG Sai-hua (2005) also believed "Interest is a good teacher for pupils to learn

a foreign language. But what are young students interested in? Games” (p. 13). At least, games will maintain their interest and can attract their attention. WANG Xin-yue (2011) suggested all learners have to be particular and teachers keep this idea central to planning lessons and choosing or designing a game. Besides, games should be organized. Then goal-directed practice coupled with targeted feedback enhances the quality of students’ learning.

To put it in a nutshell, game-based learning is a teaching method which conforms to learners both body and mind. Combining with class observations, this study provides a comprehensive view of GBL in the classroom, and shares the effectiveness of games provided in the English class.

Research Design and Results

This research aims to find out the benefits of applying game-based learning and concludes the application of games in Education First School from the following aspects: games, pupil feedback, frequency of utilization, and potential problems.

The participators are the youngest, namely small star blue in the Education First School. They are Chinese learners who age from four to six and Blue class is the most fundamental class for pre-school kids who have not started English on a large scale. What is more, all classes that the author observed were taught by experienced foreign teachers in Education First. In addition, all games used a rewarding system such as one star or happy face to satisfy learner’s psychological need. All gaming process will be recorded by teaching assistants to share with their parents and teachers, as a memento or proof about improvements.

During the class observation, it is obvious that game, learner, and childhood go together; these three aspects are regarded as an associated and inseparable system in Education First School for preschoolers. Learners can learn from games in improving tracing letters, using scissors and coloring, it is helpful when they go to kindergarten, eventually primary school or when they learn alphabet or Chinese characters. In every class, none of learners barely feel happy and fulfilling. Games make them unafraid of classes. Additionally, when educators and teaching assistant make a gaming example, they are able to understand rules immediately and to share with other classmates in their own words. Beneficial as games are, all games are supposed to design center on lesson teaching objectives. The biggest difference against traditional teaching is that the former cannot make slower students struggle, and faster students become bored. To some extent, good game-based learning is tailored for each learner. Furthermore, within an effective game-based learning English environment, they work toward a goal, experience the consequences of those actions along the way, as well as learn from mistakes. GBL provides an easy and intense learning environment as well as offers different ways of feedback rather than grades.

Discussion on the Frequently-Used Games in Education First School

The game observations are composed of pupil feedback, frequency of utilization, and potential problems. Some frequently-used games have been listed in the following table.

Warm-up Games

Warm-up is a crucial priority in English class; it does not consume time and this period tries to make every learner cheer up and prepare for the whole class.

Table 1

Warm-up Games

Games		Pupil feedback	Frequency of utilization	Potential problems
Warm-up games	Low and high voice	Acceptable and can read many times unconsciously	Every time learn new words or review difficult words	Children tend to scream and out of control.
	Role reversal	Actively participate	Every reviewing time	Shy students would react relatively slow.

According to the class observation, there are two common ways to warm-up. The former is to review what they learned. The educators get flashcards and show up, the learners have to speak loudly and quickly, the fastest one can get this flashcard. After several rounds, learners who hold up most cards have the right to be an educator and show his or her flashcards in his or her own way. The other game is Low and High Voice to cheer them up. New English words can be learned in different ways. Educators get new words by low or high voice to ask learners to follow which make them learn it unconsciously. It is totally a new access to read after compared to traditional teaching. This activity keeps learners in English learning environment, and educators are able to introduce new lesson in a relatively natural way. When they are actively engaged with a game, their minds are experiencing the pleasure of grappling with the starting of a new system. This is true whether the game is considered “entertainment”.

Group Games

After learning new words, it still has room for improvement. If educators still teach in a traditional way, it must cause a passive situation without achieving learners’ biggest self-efficacy. Games allow the students to work as a group and to work collaboratively towards a common goal.

Table 2

Group Games

Games		Pupil feedback	Frequency of utilization	Potential problems
Group games	Situational game	Enjoyable in a simulative situation	It used frequently when learning sentence patterns.	Educators should prepare real scene to make environment vivid.
	Passing game/ Puddle-jumper	Actively participate and easy for them	Every time	This game often uses in the traditional class, too.

According to the two months’ observation, there are too many group games. Situational game and passing game are just a tip of iceberg. The former keeps learners highly engaged in practicing behaviors and all processes that we can easily transfer from the simulated environment to real life. The next game can teach others, share their own knowledge with other learners, and modify the game experience. The last but most important point is that educators are supposed to give happy face or a star as an award to encourage learners. According to game-based learning experts, learners tend to be highly motivated by in-game feedback such as scores and evaluations.

Consolidation Games

Consolidation games are the third form in learning process. It needs to consolidate knowledge and add an ability which can draw inferences about other cases from one instance. These games aim at how to get more out than they put in.

Table 3

Consolidation Games

Games		Pupil feedback	Frequency of utilization	Potential problems
Consolidation games	Learn with pictures and dolls	Enjoyable and often love these dolls	Every suitable class	The only precondition is that dolls should not distract their minds.
	Stub game	Excited and enjoyable	Time about practice and consolidation	It will have a big difference.

During the observation, take one class for example, that class is about body parts. After learning new English words and group games, everyone can get one adorable toy. Educators say “eyes”, everyone should touch their toys’ eyes. In order to make it easy and funny, foreign teachers often take a mat with learners who are four to six years old and sit nicely together or everyone gets a picture to color their parts based on educators’ command.

This kind of games still aims at avoiding passive learning psychology. In a 45-minute class, it is hard to make students focused all the time, and always sitting on the small desk is not a good way to sustain the following class. Therefore, these games are helpful to release a passive emotion and cultivate a positive attitude and consolidate what has been taught in class.

Competitive Games

Competition is considered as a significant game element while others mention it as an essential game characteristic. Additionally, some kids rise to the challenge because they love to.

Table 4

Competitive Games

Games		Pupil feedback	Frequency of utilization	Potential problems
Competitive games	Throwing darts	Enjoyable	Relaxing time	A safe environment is required.
	Rock paper scissors	Easily understand	Relaxing time	For relaxation and it can produce various kinds of other similar games.

An example of a competitive game is the game “Throwing darts” which emphasizes pronunciation, memory, and reflexes, all of which are good and necessary skills to possess. Educators draw a dartboard on the blackboard, every five scores represents one word, 10 scores means learners have to read and spell two words, 15 scores stands for three words. Besides, one word can increase one happy face or one star in today’s teaching assessment. Another competitive game during observation is Rock Paper Scissors. This game can be developed in different forms; it can combine with hula-hoop which learners jump it completely and rock paper scissors at the finish line, and also can arrange with table which learners can pass through it and guess at the end. Games have multitudinous categories to refresh every class and gain independence as well as creativity. Furthermore, the educator is able to make observations on each student and see what areas the class or individuals are struggling with or excelling at as well as their performances.

Conclusion

This study is based on the observation of classes at Education First School in Ningbo, China. The implementation of GBL in the class has targeted feedback and enlightening encouragement, cooperating with a variety of teaching games. It is clear that knowledge in the book is not entire details about learning, areas

beyond knowledge zones cannot be solved by traditional teaching method. On the contrary, well-chosen games are invaluable as they give learners a break and at the same time allow them to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating learners' interests, which not only can see from class performance, but also from feedback of learners' parents, thus GBL is applicable on almost every English learner.

Look back to English class in the public school, as a matter of fact, not all games can be into every teaching stage and still cannot support complex knowledge acquisition, but it is a pretty excellent teaching aid which enhances learning efficiency. Game-based learning is a burgeoning teaching method today which has plenty of potentials waiting for us to discover.

References

- Birova, I. L. (2013). Game as a main strategy in language education. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 1(1), 7-11.
- Boyle, S. (2011). *Teaching toolkit: An introduction to games based learning*. UCD Teaching and Learning.
- Chee, Y. S. (2007). Embodiment, embeddedness, and experience: Game-based learning and the construction of identity. *Res. Practice Tech. Enhanced Learning*, 2, 3. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1142/S1793206807000282>
- LI, H. Z. (2011). 浅析游戏教学法在英语课堂上的运用 (The application of game-based learning in English class). *剑南文学 (经典教苑)*, 11, 324-325.
- MA, B. (2010). *魅力游戏, 快乐教学* (Charming games, happy teaching). 武汉: 华中师范大学.
- Perrotta, C., Featherstone, G., Aston, H., & Houghton, E. (2013). *Game-based learning: Latest evidence and future directions* (NFER research programme: Innovation in education). Slough: NFER.
- Squire, K. (2005). *Game-based learning: Present and future state of the field*. Retrieved from http://www.masie.com/xlearn/Game-Based_Learning.pdf
- Trybus, J. (n.d.). *Game-based learning: What it is, why it works, and where it's going*. Retrieved from <http://www.newmedia.org/game-based-learning--what-it-is-why-it-works-and-where-its-going.html>
- WANG, X. Y. (2011). 游戏教学法在英语课堂中的应用 (The application of game-based learning in English class). *继续教育研究*, 12, 177-178.
- XIANG, L., & GUI, L. (2011). 小学英语游戏教学法探究 (The application of game-based learning). *教学与管理*, 17, 49-51.
- ZHANG, S. H. (2005). 运用游戏教学法提高小学生英语学习的兴趣 (Applying games teaching approach to improve primary school students' interest in English). 辽宁: 辽宁师范大学.
- ZHU, L. (2014). *游戏在幼儿英语教学中的应用* (The application of games in English teaching in kindergartens). 山东: 山东师范大学.