Investigating the influence of Utilizing Communication Games Strategy on Enhancing EFL Learners' Speaking Skill

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the influence of utilizing communication games strategy o improve EFL beginners speaking skill. The study adopted the experimental analytical method. A pre-post-test has been used as primary tool for data collection, the sample of the study consists of (40) students from two different schools (male and female) at Khartoum state. The researchers applied a Chi- squared test to analyze and verify the hypothesis. The results revealed that playing game are an effective technique for engaging beginners in using English language verbally as long as possible. Communication games are also appropriate activities that can be carried outside and inside the classroom and may be played with different other people from those at the class. In the light of these results, the study recommends that applying games should be adopted as one of the techniques for developing verbal interaction skills, because it proved its effectiveness for the purpose of verbal interaction with young learners.

Key words: Activity -Interaction-Verbal - Psychological

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة عن أثر استخدام استراتيجية الألعاب التواصلية لتحسين مهارة الكلام لدى دارسي اللغة الانجليزية باعتبارها لغة اجنبية. واتبع الباحث المنهج التجريبي لإجراء الدراسة عن طريق استخدام الاختبار القبلي والبعدي كاداة لجمع البيانات ، واشتملت عينة الدراسة على (40) طالبا بمرحلة الاساس (بنين وبنات) في ولاية الخرطوم . وطبق الباحثون اختبار كاي لتحليل وتحقيق الفرضيات. واوضحت النتائج ان أثر ممارسة الالعاب كوسيلة فعالة في جنب المبتدئين لاستخدام اللغة الانجليزية شفهيا على المدى الممكن . ايضا وضح جليا أن الالعاب التواصلية هي نشاطات مناسبة يمكن ممارستها داخل وخارج فصول الدراسة ويمكن أن تمارس مع أشخاص خلاف الذين هم داخل الفصول . على ضوء هذه النتائج اوصت الدراسة يجب ان تكون الالعاب مطبقة كواحدة من الطرق لتطويرمهارات التفاعل الشفهي,لان اثبتت تاثيرها لغرض تفاعلها الشفهي مع دارسي الصغار .

الكلمات المفتاحية: نشاط– التفاعل– لفظي– نفسي.

Introduction

Speaking is one of the basic language skills that must be given special emphasis in the language classroom. Speaking is interaction and should be taught through communication; therefore, the teachers have to give their students the opportunity to interact with each other. In fact learning foreign language is undoubtedly a challenge to non-native speakers. But the big challenge is the low motivation of EFL pupils and teachers inability of keeping their pupils interested. These difficulties normally affect and hinder EFL pupils' performance, so the interest is very crucial factor for learning regardless of whether for language learning or another reason.

As it goes without thinking most of the young learners love playing games andthey are very interested of doing so whenever and wherever, therefore, this study is conducted to benefit from this positive attitude of the pupils (interest in playing games) by using English language as a medium for playing games. In fact pupilsinability of expressing their needs may mainly due to their lack of practice which in turn causes lack of interest. Thus, playing games maximizes English language practice so that driven pupils for practicing language to interact with the game actions.

Statement of the problem

In general it is observed that teachers fail in keeping pupils interests up to use English language for the purpose of communication. In particular EFL beginners reflect that an inability of using of using English language verbally. Thus, low motivation of the pupils influence in their learning so, it is important that pupils interest be promoted and kept up as much as possible in order to maximize their verbal interaction. Therefore, this study is conducted in order to help EFL beginners to develop their oral communication ability in the early stages of learning by using what they have an interestin, namely communication games.

Significance of the study

There is a need for establishing an effective classroom interaction. Thus, this study is important and beneficial for teachers whose major objective is developing speaking skills at the early stage of learning English as a foreign language. In addition, it is helpful for the teachers who are interested in creating an effective verbal classroom interaction for the beginners at the early stages of learning English.

Objectives of the study

This study is intended to :

1- To demonstrate that communication games help students engaging in verbal classroom interaction.

Question of the study

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1- To what extent can communication games help students engage in verbal classroom interaction ?

Hypotheses of the study

This study hypotheizess the following:

1- Communication games helps students engage in verbal classroom interaction.

Limits of the study

This study is limited to the pupils of sixth basic class of the academic year 2019 – 2020. The study took place at Hairman basic school for girls and Khalid Ibn Al waleed basic school for boys, Khartoum , Sudan .

Definition of Games

Language games are not activities mainly aimed to break the ice between students or to kill time. Byrne (1995) gave the definition to games as a form of play governed by ruler. They should be enjoyed and fun. They are not just a diversion break from routine activities. Similarly, Jill Hadfield (1990) defined games as "an activity, with rules, a good and an element of fun".

There are a great number of language games, so teacher have a variety of choices. However, in deciding which game to use in a particular class and which games will be most appropriate band most successful with their students, teachers must take many factors into account.

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According to Carrier (1990), teachers should first consider the level of the game to fit their students' language level. They should choose the game that fit the purposes of that class or the content.

Moreover, teachers should consider students characteristics: whether they are old or young, serious-minded or light-hearted, and highly motivated to learn or not. They should also consider when the game should be used.

According to Richard-Amato (1996), even though games are often associated with fun, we should not lose sight of their pedagogical values, particularly in second language teaching. Games are effective because they provide motivation, lower students' stress, and give them the opportunity for real communication.

The Notion of Games

There are a number of reasons that games deserve a place in the language classroom. First of all, they are fun, which is extremely important, because they can help activate students who may have been inactive before, due to lack of interest. Keeping students active is vital because teachers will never be able to actually teach students anything unless they can get them to participate in their own learning process.

Second, games also play a big part in helping participants build relationships, and to feel equal. Playing games in the classroom can also help create a friendly and positive atmosphere where seat arrangement can differ from game to game, and thus cause diversity from the norm which can be extremely helpful in keeping an exciting learning environment.

Third, the reason most people want to learn a language is to be able to use it in real situations, for example when travelling. Games can be a very good way to practice this skill because they can easily be used to reenact various situations from real life and provide students with practice in their fluency. Also, by using games in the classroom the teacher is giving his students a bigger role, and he himself is stepping out of the frontline which is a positive thing because it allows students to take on more responsibility. Also that allows students to do more on their own, and that can very well result in an increase in their confidence level. (Langran& Purcell, 1994.:12-14).

Fourth, language students need to be exposed to the language in a variety of situations, which is a need games can fulfill. Language students also need to be ready to take on the experience, keeping their minds open and being willing participants Again, games make this possible.

Fifth, language students need to be emotionally involved, meaning they need to feel something while they are exposed to the language. Strong emotions, such as happiness, excitement, amusement and suspense allow students to feel positively about their learning situation and are therefore likely to have a positive effect on language learning.

Sixth, games are good for shy students and students with low confidence, and that applies specifically when playing takes place in smaller groups because then they get a chance to speak in front of fewer audience instead of having to express themselves in front of the whole class.

Also it is sometimes easier to open up and forget the shyness when playing a game because the atmosphere is not as serious and more emphasis is put on fluency rather than grammatical correctness. (Langran& Purcell, 1994:12-14).

Seventh, games can be a good strategy when teaching various subjects because they are very likely to spark interest amongst students. They can be used with students of all ages, and when they are used with other teaching methods they create diversity which is ideal for school work (Ingvar Sigurgeirsson.1999.p. 80). A study that was undertaken in Iceland in 2006 shows clearly the need for diversity in schools. Many participants in that study complained about the lack of diversity, and that they wanted more of it in order for their learning to become more fun and progressive in their school (Lovísa, Laufey&Samúel, 2006: 34).

Finally, using games in the classroom is important because many children do not get enough opportunity to play during their free time, which can be traced to the rapid changes in our society. Cities are getting bigger and traffic is getting heavier which means that more and more parents are hesitant to let their children play outside. Also passive activities such as watching television, or the computer screen are seen as being more exciting than actually physically playing, so today the sight of children playing various games in groups outside is becoming much more rare than it was 10, 15 or 20 years ago. This is not a good development, and it can have several bad consequences for our society. One possible consequence is that the lack of movement can cause health problems because even though not all games are physical some certainly are (Masheder.1989.p. 3). Another consequence this change might have is decreased social skills because, according to Piaget, children's games reflect society and that by playing games children learn many of society's rules and regulations (Cole & Lightfoot,2005: 536).

The Teachers Role in CLT Activities

Since the learner is the focus of Communicative Language Teaching activities, the teacher's role in those exercises is less dominant. However, this does not mean that the teacher is a passive participant in classroom activities. Rather, she or he has many tasks to perform.

According to Breen and Candlin (1980) states that teacher has two major roles in CLT activities. The first role is to facilitate the communication process and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant in those activities (qtd. in .C. Richards and Rodgers 1986: 77). Other secondary roles assumed by the teacher are: an organizer, a guide, a researcher, and a learner at the same time (ibid).

The teacher also acts as a needs analyst who is in charge of determining and responding to the learner language needs, a counselor who acts as a communicator to match the speaker's intention and the hearers' interpretations through paraphrasing, confirming, and feedback; as well as a group process manager who arranges the classroom situation for communication an communicative activities (ibid, 78).

Littlewood, (1981: 19) suggests other roles for the teacher in communication activities.

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He argued that the teacher's presence in classroom activities represents a psychological support to students, especially those who find a difficulty to be independent participants. Moreover, the teacher may act as a controller who prevents the learners' resort to their first language, and who sometimes corrects some critical errors that may negatively affect the learners' speech. Another important role for the teacher is that of acting as an advisor who provides learners with necessary language items when they are unable to maintain interaction.

Communication Games

Communication games are activities which increase interaction among students through talking to one another in order to solve a puzzle, draw a picture, put things in the right order, find similarities and differences between pictures, and so on (Harmer 2001: 272). Examples of communication games can be: 'Telling a Story', an activity which encourages students to use their imagination, and to tell a story (Bell and Gower qtd. in Watcyn-Jones 1995: 7), and 'Call My Bluff' in this game, a group of students is divided into two teams. Team A is given a word not known by group B. This latter has to guess the right definition among the three ones proposed by team A (Harmer, 2001: 272). Communication games are mainly useful because they provide students with the opportunity to speak using the target language and maximize interaction in the language classroom.

Methodology

The study adopts the experimental method. The population of this study consists of sixth year class of basic level, Khartoum, Sudan. A random sample of forty pupils: twenty girls from at Hairman basic school for girls andtwenty boys from Khalid Ibn Al waleed basic school for boys, Khartoum city, Sudan were selected. They are divided into two groups: group A which includes twenty females and group B which includes twenty males. The pupils of both groups are paired according to friendship tie. Two oral tests (pre-post-test) are conducted on two groups (A & B) as tool for collecting data.

Background of the Study Target Sample

Sample of this study are second year of studying English as a foreign language, deals with book one of Sudan Practical Integrated National English. When in the first year pupils just studied English language alphabet, thus, their second year starts with using these, those, this, that, have and has which in the current study are used for forming oral tests.

Tools of Data Collection

The study adopts two oral tests (pre-post-test) as a tool for data collection. Items of the test are derived from the pupils' text book SPINE ONE. Unit one. It contains eleven items, six yes/no questions and five word questions. Data was analyzed through SPSS software. The validity and reliability of the tool was confirmed by using Cronbach's alpha equation shown below:

Reliability coefficient =n (1- Total variations questions) N-1

Variation college grades

Cronbach's alpha coefficient =(0.82), a reliability coefficient is high and it indicates the stability of the scale and the validity of the study Validity coefficient is the square root of the reliability coefficient is (0.91), and this shows that there is a high sincerity of the scale.

Procedures of data collection

Both groups (A& B) are subjected to two oral tests namely pre and post test. Firstly, the two groups are exposed to oral test. The following days both groups are exposed to the new teaching program in which the pupils practical English language orally through playing games for four weeks in four classes. After the four weeks both groups were subjected to the post test to mark their progress.

Results and discussions

Pre & post test

Table 1: The frequency distribution of the variable Pre and post questions

No	Questions	Test type	Assessment of tasks performance		
			fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Not fulfilled
1	What do have in your bag?	Pre	0	18	22
			0.0	45.0	55.0
		Post	38	1	1
			95.0	2.5	2.5
2	Do you have a cat in your bag?	Pre	1	8	31
			2.5	20.0	77.5
		Post	38	1	1
			95.0	2.5	2.5
3	What is this?	Pre	2	16	22
			5.0	40.0	55.0
		Post	38	2	0
			95.5	5.0	0.0
4	What is this and what is that?	Pre	2	14	24
			5.0	35.0	60.0
		Post	36	3	1
			90.0	7.5	2.5
5	Do you have a desk in your classroom?	Pre	2	5	33
			5.0	12.5	82.5
		Post	39	0	1
			97.5	0.0	2.5
6	Is this desk?	Pre	2	26	12
			5.0	65.0	30.0
		Post	40	0	0
			100.0	0.0	0.0
7	What is that?	Pre	7	23	10
			17.5	57.5	25.0
		Post	39	0	1
			97.5	0.0	2.5
8	Is this a cat?	Pre	1	12	27
			2.5	30.0	67.5
		Post	37	2	1
			92.5	5.0	2.5
9	What is that and	Pre	16	22	2

what is this?		40.0	55.0	5.0
	Post	38	1	1
		95.0	2.5	2.5
10 Is this a book?	Pre	1	8	31
		2.5	20.0	77.5
	Post	38	2	0
		95.0	5.0	0.0
11 Is this a train?	Pre	20	17	3
		50.0	42.0	7.5
	Post	39	0	1
		97.5	0.00	2.5

From table (1) the results of both tests are discussed and compared to check participants performance and progress before and after exposing to the new teaching program. As shown, questions 1, 3,4,7,9 are information questions and 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 are YES/NO questions. Starting with information questions, Q1 in pre-test shows that more than half of the participants didn`t succeed in fulfilling the question and the rest partially fulfilled the question. However, for the same question Q1 in post-test, the result displays that most of the participants (95%) successfully fulfilled the question. It indicates that the game was a very effective technique in the participants' progress.

The result of Q3 in both tests is very similar to the result of Q1 with very little differences. As shown in pre-test in Q3 that 55% of the participants completely failed in fulfilling the question, 40% of them partially fulfilled the item and that means just 5% of participants could successfully fulfill it. In the same question but in terms of post-test the result has shown that 95% of the participants successfully fulfilled the question and the rest of percentage is equally distributed between the two other scales. This means that there is remarkable progress after playing the game.

The results of Q4 in pre-test shows that just 5% of the participants succeeded in fulfilling the question whereas in post-test 95% of them successfully fulfilled the question. Again, it is confirmed that using games have a very effective role in making pupils interact orally well and overcome their inability of speaking.

The results of the last question of the word questions group, Q9`s result in pre-test showed that 55% of the participants partially fulfilled the question, 40% of them succeeded in fulfilling and just 5% failed in fulfilling. While post-test results obtained showed that 95% of the participants succeeded in fulfilling the question. From the result of Q9it can be pointed out that the participants in pre-test show progress in fulfilling compared to their performance in the other questions and still steadily attain very interesting progress in the post. Thus, from the results of word questions, it is observed that there is a significant difference between participants` oral performance of

Benefit to the post test

As for YES/NO questions, the result of Q2 in pre-test has shown that most of the participants i.e.77% fail in fulfilling the question and 20% of them did not fulfill it properly.

The result of the same question but in terms of post-test shows that the majority of the participants 95% successfully dealt with it. It is clear that the participants orally succeeded in using the verb to 'have' in the form of present simple particularly in YES/NO question.

The result of Q5 in pre-test shows that the majority 82.5% of the participants failed in fulfilling the question orally whereas the majority of the participants or 97% in the post-test succeeded in fulfilling it orally. It means that there is a very good difference of benefit in the post test. As for the result of Q6 in pre-test shows that 65% of the participants partially fulfilled the question, 30 % of them failed in fulfilling whereas 5% fulfilled it. The result of Q6 in terms of post-test shows that the whole participants 100% successfully achieved what is intended to be achieved. It means that in the pre-test the majority of participants did well attempt even it was partial, whereas the result in post-test really was fantastic so their performance was completely satisfying.

The result of Q8 in pre-test shows that 67.5% of the participants at all not fulfilled the question, 30% of them partially fulfilled it and 2.5% succeed in fulfilling it. In post-test of this question the result shows that 92.5% of the participants fulfilled the question successfully, 5% of them partially fulfilled it and 2.5% failed in fulfilling it. It means that the result of the post-test supports the effectiveness of using games in verbal interaction. The result of Q10 in pre-test shows that 77.5% of the participants failed in fulfilling the question, 20% of them partially fulfilled it and 2.5% of them succeeded in fulfilling it. The result of post question showed that the majority of participants 95% succeeded in fulfilling the question. It supports the same result that obtained above here. The last question of YES/NO part is question 11. The result of Q11 is quite different; in pre-test score showed that half of participantsi.e.50% succeeded in fulfilling the question, 42.5% of them partially fulfilled it and 7.5% fail in fulfilling it. The result of the same question namely Q11 in-post-test shows that the majority 97.5% of the participants succeeded in fulfilling the questions whereas 2.5% of them failed in fulfilling. This means that half of participants already successfully fulfilled the question before exposed to the new teaching program. In spite of, the fact that the majority of participants also do succeeded in fulfilling the question. The total result of YES/NO question showed that there is a significant difference in participants performance that was clear favours the post test.

No.	Questions	Test	Chi-Square	df	sig	Median	Scale
1	What do have in your bag?	Pre	36.950	2	0.000	1.00	Not fulfilled
		Post	68.450	2	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
2	Do you have a cat	Pre	15.800	2	0.000	1.00	Not fulfilled

	in your bag?	Post	68.450	2	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
3	What is this?	Pre	18.200	2	0.000	1.00	Not fulfilled
		Post	32.400	1	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
4	What is this and what is that?	Pre	43.850	2	0.000	1.00	Not fulfilled
		Post	57.950	2	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
5	Do you have a desk in your classroom?	Pre	21.800	2	0.000	2.00	Partially fulfilled
		Post	36.100	1	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
6	Is this desk?	Pre	10.850	2	0.004	2.00	Partially fulfilled
		Post	No difference			3.00	Fulfilled
7	What is that?	Pre	25.550	2	0.000	1.00	Not fulfilled
		Post	36.100	1	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
8	Is this a cat?	Pre	15.800	2	0.000	2.00	Partially fulfilled
		Post	68.050	2	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
9	What is that and what is this?	Pre	36.950	2	0.000	1.00	Not fulfilled
		Post	68.450	2	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
10	Is this a book?	Pre	12.350	2	0.002	2.50	Fulfilled
		Post	32.400	1	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled
11	Is this a train?	Pre	7.400	2	0.025	2.50	Fulfilled
		Post	36.100	1	0.000	3.00	Fulfilled

Table 2: The statistical tests for the hypothesis

From table (2) the statistical treatment of pre-test for the questions 1,2,3,4,7 and 9 have shown that high significant value is for the scale (not fulfilled), questions 5,6,8 showed high significant value favoured the scale (partially fulfilled) and questions 10,11 are showed high significant value for the scale (fulfilled). It means that most of the YES/NO questions in the pre-test stage were marked in the scale (partially fulfilled and fulfilled) but the majority was for the scale (partially fulfilled). This indicates that the participants were already able to deal with these types of questions but not properly. However, in terms of post-test stage the participants showed high competence in dealing with these types of questions. As for word questions, it has shown that most of the questions in pre-test was marked of benefit to the scale (not fulfilled). The results of all word questions in post-test stage have shown high significant value of benefit to the scale (fulfilled). This means that most of the participants in the pre-test were unable to interact with word questions however, they interact properly with these questions in the post test stage. This indicates that there is a significant difference between pre-post-test, however, the result favoured the post test. Totally, participants performance after engaging in playing games for the purpose of initiating speaking English achieved a remarkable progress in speaking.

Conclusion

As has been seen, the study tried to find out whether using games can stimulate EFL beginners to engage in verbal interaction, and how it keeps them interested in practicing English language verbally, whenever and wherever it is possible.

The results has shown that: playing games is an effective technique of stimulating EFL beginners to initiate speaking particularly in pair work from. Also, one of the important conclusions of the study is that the activity arouses EFL beginners' interest to use English verbally inside oral and outside classroom context with different people. In addition, the study found that, playing games creates interesting learning atmosphere.

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