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ADVANTAGES OF USING LANGUAGE GAMES IN TEACHING VOCABULARY

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Abstract: In this article it is said about advantages and importance of vocabulary games in teaching lexis. There are many options to build a solid vocabulary base. The problem is that many students find learning vocabulary boring. Teachers have to be creative and inventive to make vocabulary presentation funny and enjoyable.

Key words: language learning, getting motivation, an unconscious process, communication, to compete, evaluation, enjoyable time.

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Nowadays the English language has got status of a global language due to globalization and general computerization. Language learning, successfully, expects motivation. Getting motivation is possible only due to transformation of each pupil from the passive contemplator into the active and creative participant of learning process, for instance, pupils should be involved into communication. Vocabulary games are very effective for being involved into communication.

Before we have a look at the theory of games, we will begin by a simple description of classroom activities.

One of the activities is teaching which can be divided into three subcategories: games, exercises and conversations. Each subcategory has its own purpose. For games, it is having fun. Exercises are used by teachers to study the language. To share real information and practice students' communicative skills are the purposes of conversations. Besides teaching, there is also the evaluation, which helps to check if the process of learning is successful or not.

Baudains & Baudains admit that "It's not easy to sustain the argument that learners should always find

immediate enjoyment in their class work, and even more difficult to support it with practical ideas that will stimulate students and educators in an infinity of different teaching situations"[1,177]. That is why teachers should use games. Young learners love them, in many cases, they fairly call for them. They understand games as a natural part of their lives, something they need to surround them to evoke enjoyable and friendly environment. They further assume that games are also a ticket to the world in which there is no passive and boring accepting of grammatical rules and noting them down into exercises books.

If we should give a scholarly term for games, we would define them as different activities that evoke a pleasant and enchanting atmosphere for participants. Baudains & Baudains give this definition of games: "Games are activities students do for their own sake, for the immediate fun, curiosity or competitive ambition aroused by the game"[1, 178].

Games essentially require certain set of rules adhered by all players to keep boundaries of fair play and to achieve the intended goal. Lewis & Bedson express that "The rules of the game set clear limits within which the children's natural decision-making processes must function"[2,67].

Stevick distinguishes four features of games. First one is that players have something in common like ability to play the game or a thing that is necessary for playing the game (cards, a dice, aboard). The

second feature is the rule of the game. The feature here is that any restrictions on the players' actions still leave them free enough so that their actions are not entirely predictable. That means that players are able to react according to the situation and choose the best solution to be successful in the game. The last feature that Stevick mentions is the goal of the game. The goal should be mentioned by the teacher in order that students know what the objectives of the game are.[6, 87].

As far as the application of games in language teaching, teachers decide to include games for many reasons, as it will be demonstrated further.

It is widely recognized and well documented that using games in English classes has a positive impact on the learner's process of language acquisition. They can be used as warm-up activities, time fillers or they can function as a main point in the lesson plan, or even in the whole syllabus.

Games take a share in a broad language development of learners. McCallum says that "There are many valid reasons for using games in the language classroom, not least among them the sheer enjoyment of a moment of relaxation after some arduous drilling"[3, 23].

Some of the reasons for using games are declared by Lewis & Bedson as they declare that apart from their motivational value as an enjoyable form of activity, they provide a context in which the language is embedded. This context

is 'authentic' in the sense that game creates its own world: for the duration of the game, it replaces external reality [2,67].

O'Dell & Head contribute to this topic when they express that "Words are most easily learnt when students manipulate them and make them their own in some memorable way. For both these reasons, games have a particularly important role to play in vocabulary learning: they provide an enjoyable way of revisiting words and they give students the opportunity to use them in a memorable context" [4, 145].

Hence, games can be signs of freshness and, if used fittingly, they produce a whiff of innovation and create a friendly atmosphere among students and teachers.

The most valuable fact is that throughout games, learners have to communicate somehow. It is very generally accepted that while playing, learners are more communicative and less frightened from using a foreign language. They use the language and enjoy it by virtue of the feeling that they can communicate without a strict control and monitoring of the level of their grammar.

McCallum expresses that: "Students, in the informal atmosphere of game play, are less self-conscious and therefore more apt to experiment and freely participate in using the foreign language. Both teachers and students can benefit from engaging games into learning process"[3, 300].

That means that learners find themselves in an unconscious

process of language learning.

Students need games and it can be a good motivation for them to use playing activities as an instrument of their subconscious learning. We can consider that as an integral part of learning process.

Games are helpful because they can make students feel that certain words are important and necessary, because without those words, the object of the game cannot be achieved.

You can look up words in dictionaries or in the internet, you can read books and newspapers, listen to the news or music, chat with friends all over the world, write letters or e-mails to your friends, go to English courses. There are many options to build a solid vocabulary base. The problem is that many students find learning vocabulary boring. Teachers have to be creative and inventive to make vocabulary presentation funny and enjoyable. They sometimes have limited resources at school (no computers, interactive white boards). But there are activities that can be done without expensive and sophisticated equipment. One possibility to make learning vocabulary remarkable moment is application of vocabulary games.

Vocabulary games can be described as activities that are orientated towards practicing and revision of lexical sets, but more importantly, they are being used for entertainment and for making learning and memorizing vocabulary great fun.

There is a variety of vocabulary games that can be found on the internet, in magazines or books, so teachers can find inexhaustible amounts of ideas, advice and inspiration for vocabulary games there.

Sasson comes with the following classification of the vocabulary games. He distinguishes three types of them:

1. Creative and fun vocabulary games.
2. Vocabulary guessing games.
3. Vocabulary games and group work.

We will look at Sasson's classification into detail now. Some of the games adherent to creative and fun vocabulary games are for example games connected with "Alphabetizing" when students are given a letter of the alphabet and their task is to think of words beginning with the letter. This activity offers numerous possibilities and modifications. To make it more difficult, teachers can choose a particular topic which will be connecting with the alphabetizing, for instance fruit, vegetables, animals, jobs. "Picture dictation" is another type of creative vocabulary games. Students try to draw or demonstrate what the teacher describes. It can be an object, a situation or scene.

"Mimicry and charades" belong to the second category of Sasson's classification, which are vocabulary guessing games. During these games, students try to guess the words through the pantomime or gestures.

Then popular "Hangman" can be found here, too. To play this game, you should follow these steps. There are dashes on the blackboard. The dashes represents missing letters. Students guess the letters. If the letters are in the word, they are written instead of the dashes. If the guesses are not correct, the picture of the hangman starts to appear on the blackboard after each incorrect tip. Students attempt to find out the word before the man is hung, which signals the end of the game.

Another group of games according to Sasson are games based on group work. "Cooperative story telling" is mentioned here as an activity during which groups of students are given a list of words that they have to use to create a story. "Find the differences" is an activity when groups of students find small differences between pictures that seem to be identical on the first sight [5,120].

Of course Sasson's classification does not provide a complete list of vocabulary games. We can use other games and activities like 'Bingo' which is very popular among students. The essential point of this game is that students have a card with several squares (nine ideally) and teacher calls out different words. If students find the word on their card, they cross it out. The winner is anyone who crosses out all the words on the card. It is a great chance to practice everything from numbers, irregular verbs, adjectives or cultural topics. There is no boundary in our fantasy.

'Kufri' is a kind of guessing games. It is based on a popular Czech game show. Students compete in pairs. The principle of the game is that one student explains words to his or her partner who does not see the words, so he or she has to guess what word it is on grounds of the partner's description and explanation. This is not just about vocabulary. Students apply their abilities to understand words in context, they strengthen their skills to define words on the one hand and to analyze given information and put the ideas into the context on the other hand.

Nowadays there is a variety of board games that help with practicing of vocabulary. We can mention Scrabble or Kris Kros, a Czech alternative. The great advantage of these board games is that they influence positively critical thinking.

Crossword puzzles are a good tip for working on lexis. Crossword

puzzles as activities that force players to consider words based upon letter clues.

An example of matching game called Thesaurus Tangle: in this synonym-matching game, students are presented with a word and then given a jumbled selection of letters. Players have to sort the letters to form a word that means the same things as the word that they were initially given. As students move through the game, their scores grow, and the words become more difficult. Students can compete among one another in an attempt to earn the highest score, or instead just try to get as many words as they can in an allotted amount of time.

Not only these games do teachers use as vocabulary games, different quizzes, pexeso or flashcards are other choices. There is really a vast choice and it is up to teachers which games they include in their classes.

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