Language Games as a Part of Edutainment
Şule ÇELİK KORKMAZ*a*

aInstructor, Uludağ University, Bursa, Turkey

Abstract

Teaching English through games is one of the best ways to provide entertainment when learning a language. Hence, this study aims at investigating what primary school children think about learning a language through games, and finding out whether there is congruence between the children’s and English language teachers’ perspectives about the issue. 121 5th grade learners and 60 language teachers were asked to complete a 23-item questionnaire about different aspects of using games in language classes. The results revealed mostly positive opinions about the issue and there are statistically significant differences between learners’ and teachers’ ideas on several points.

Keywords: Edutainment; education, learning through games

1. Introduction

Why does a child create classroom management problems in a class? Teachers generally accuse unruly children of disrupting the class. However, they should not forget to examine reasons for being unmotivated for the lesson. Teachers must raise awareness of what they expect from children to do in their classes. Do they expect them being silent, sitting on desks in rows without moving around, being interested in and motivated for the lesson or learning in a way that teachers teach? Of course these expectations do not become realistic when we consider energetic kids in our classes. Teachers need to be sure that they are teaching their lessons by taking children’s characteristics into consideration and their immediate needs such as having good time in the classroom. Thus, they need to create and use a good many of activities in view of children’s needs for fun and without confining themselves doing whatever provided in the prescribed coursebooks step by step just as we observe in a formal classroom environment.

2. Games to turn education into edutainment

When we consider the characteristics of young children, edutainment would be a better term rather than education for younger children. Learners need fast, active and exploratory activities; thus, not traditional school-based leaning but game-based learning which has the motivational power to make the learning fun may meet the needs of learners’ demands (Kirriemuir-j, 2004). As Ahuja (1994) stated, the objectives of the activity which sometimes have little meaning to children are explained to learners in conventional education whereas the objective is kept hidden in the activities driven by exploration, discovery and adventure in interactive edutainment, a good
example of which is game. Learners are not directed to focus on the language during game-based activities, instead of this, games provide meaningful and fun context in a way that children are motivated naturally to engage in it. Researches to this date have signified various advantages of integrating games into our language teaching which are recapitulated as follows; games emphasize the meaning in language learning, thus, learners will better remember the language they learnt (Tuan & Doan, 2010); games enable children to develop physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively besides being enjoyable and fun either as a competition or cooperation with a clearly defined goals and rules (Read, 2007); games provide fun and comfortable environment in which learners are more motivated to take risks in language practice (Wright, Betteridge, and Buckybuy, 2006). In the TEEM report (McFarlane et al 2002), teachers and parents recognized that games can support valuable skill development such as strategic thinking, communication, negotiating skills. However, neither teachers nor parents were happy with the notion of playing games in lesson time since such skill development did not match the criteria assessed in high stakes national tests. Despite this fear of teachers and parents, many benefits of integrating games into language teaching as emphasized above motivated the researcher to investigate the following research questions to determine the place of games in language classes of Turkey;

1. What do primary school children think about learning a language through games?
2. Is there congruence between the children’s and English language teachers’ perspectives with regard to learning through games?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants
The participants were 121 5th grade learners from three different state primary schools in Bursa in Turkey and 60 state primary school English teachers (43 females and 17 males) from four different provinces in Turkey. 37 teachers had three to ten years teaching experiences with young children whereas 23 of them had more than ten years experiences. They all graduated from ELT departments of different universities in Turkey.

3.2. Data Collection Tools and Procedure
In the study, a 23 item structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert-type rating scale was formed by the researcher in order to investigate what young learners and practicing teachers think about learning through games. The items in the questionnaire were prepared considering the related literature about games, thus they were grouped under five categories as: general statements (1, 2, 3, 20, 22, 23); ludic principles of a game (4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13); types of games (14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21); time issues (6, 7, 8,); and possible problems (9, 17, 24). The questionnaire was administered via e-mails and handouts. Based on the Cronbach’s alpha, the internal consistency reliability of the learners’ questionnaire was found to be 0, 709 and the teachers’ 0, 82. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was administered to 10 learners to de the results obtained from the questionnaire.

3.3. Data analysis
The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed through SPSS 13.0. to have simple descriptive statistical results such as frequency results, mean scores and standard deviations in order to reveal the participants’ views regarding the categories and the items in the questionnaire. To find out whether there are statistically differences between the learners’ and teachers’ perspectives, the independent sample t-test was used. For the qualitative aspect of the study, the data of the interviews were transcribed and content-analyzed in order to deepen the results obtained from the questionnaire.

4. Findings
The 23-item structured questionnaire investigating primary school learners’ ideas revealed mostly positive results regarding learning English through games. Based on the mean scores of the categories in the questionnaire, the learners mostly agreed on the general points. Under this category, most of the participants (94.2%) thought that
The second high score is about ludic principles of a successful game (mean 4.15), which revealed agreement on the following points in order of high scores such as setting rules (item 10), cooperation (item 4), competition (item 5), fun elements (item 11), teachers’ demonstration (item 13) and teachers’ use of L1 (item 11). As to this category, 97.5% of the participants agreed that children should know the rules at the beginning of the games and 92.5% of them thought that when children play cooperative games, the lesson becomes more enjoyable. Accepting the significance of cooperation, most of them highlighted their desire for competition as well, as 80.2% of them agreed that when they play games in the form of competition, they will have more fun. Moreover, 77.7% of the learners confirmed that if games played in a classroom are not fun, children lose their motivation. The last two results in this category are so important for learners to comprehend the procedure of a game. 73.5% of the learners reported that teachers should explain how to play a game by using simple English with the help of demonstration. On the other hand, nearly the same percentage of the learners (71.7) thought that teachers should explain how to play a game in L1, which is the indicator of children’s expectation from their teachers to use L1 in explaining the game.

The third category which was about timing of a game (mean 3.40) revealed some dubiousness except for item 8. 72.8% of the learners agreed that any subjects could be taught in the form of games at any time of the lesson. On the other hand, although more than half of the participants (55.4%) believed that the time allocated to play games in English lesson was enough (item 6), 43.8% of them thought that it was not enough. As to when to play a game, nearly half of them (49.6%) stated that they can play games only at the end of the lesson while 49.8% of them disagreed. Based on the interview results, some of the learners reported that their teachers let them play games in the lesson as a reward after completing their tasks which are mostly in the form of worksheet. For example, one of the interviewees stated that “when we play games at the end of the lesson, it becomes more enjoyable and we can discuss about the games during break time”. Another interviewee (I5) mentioned; “our teachers say that if we finish vocabulary matching activity right away, we can play games; thus we try to complete the activity immediately.”

The fourth category with regard to types of a game (mean 4.06) revealed the following order respectively considering the frequency results of the items; vocabulary, writing, listening, reading, grammar and speaking games. 84.3% of the participants reported that children like playing games when learning vocabulary and 83.4 of them stated that children produce more sentences when they write in English as a game. Moreover, 81.9% of the learners agreed that children were able to understand English better when they were playing listening game and 81.8% of them revealed that when children read English texts as a game, they could understand better. 81% of them believed that children like to play games when learning grammar structures. However, with regard to speaking games, the participants’ views were not so positive, as only 55.4% of them believed that children could speak English more comfortably when playing games. The reason for having problems with speaking games might be understood in the statement of interviewee 4; “as we are concentrated on the game, we find it difficult to speak in English; therefore, our teacher lets us speak in Turkish. However, we learn the target subjects of the game in English by writing many times on our notebooks.”

The last category in the questionnaire was about possible problems (mean 3.11) such as noise, the use of L1 and exam-oriented education system. Although the results revealed that most of the learners (84.3%) were not disturbed by the noise when they were playing games, more than half of the participants (68.6%) agreed that they always speak Turkish when playing games and they do not have time to be prepared for the exams when they learn English through games. Interviewee 9 shared her ideas about using L1 during games based on her friend’s conversations during break time; “speaking English is very difficult for some of my friends and this makes them become reluctant to speak English, as they thought that speaking English is very boring.” The interview results were consistent with the TEEM report (McFarlane et al 2002) about education system in Turkey; in that, some of the children mentioned that they felt parent pressure on themselves to study for the exams to get higher scores.
With regard to second research question which was formed to ascertain whether there is congruence between the children’s and English language teachers’ perspectives about learning through games, the independent sample t-test result in table 1 indicated significant differences between the learners and teachers in 17 points whereas there appeared congruence between two groups on 6 aspects of using games in the classroom such as competition, fun elements, teachers’ use of demonstration, L1 use when playing games, speaking games and exam-issues.

The t-test result of item 1 \[t = 0.014, \ p<0.05\] showed statistically significant difference between two groups that the students revealed higher percentage (94.2%) than the teachers (76.6%), which means that children became happy when they played games in their English lesson. Regarding comprehension and retention, the t-test results \[t= 0,\]
p<0.01] showed statistically significant differences. Despite the teachers’ doubts (36.7%) about the issues, children were more certain that they understand English when they play games in the lesson and the subjects learners learnt through games become more permanent. Another statistical significant difference appeared regarding cooperation [t= 0, p<0.01] that although some of the teachers were neutral, (35%) the students agreed that when they played cooperative games the lesson became more fun.

With regard to allocated time, the t-test result revealed statistically significant difference [t = 0, 01, p<0.01] that the higher percentage of the learners (55.4 %) than the teachers (13.3%) believed the adequacy of the time allocated to play games in English lesson. There is also statistically significant difference [t= 0.02, p<0.05] related to timing of a game within the lesson that although 49.6% of the students thought that they can play games only at the end of the lesson, only 6.7% of the teachers agreed on this idea. Moreover, the groups differ in their ideas with regard to item 8 [t = 0, p<0.01] that although 72.8 % of the learners agreed that any subjects could be taught in the form of games at any time of the lesson, only 18.3 of the teachers agreed on the issue. When the participants’ views were compared, the t-test results indicated significant differences related to noise [t = 0, p<0.01] and rules of a game [t= 0,001, p<0.05], which means that the students with higher percentage than the teachers reported that they were not disturbed by the noise when they were playing games and the rules of a game should be clear before playing a game. Corresponding with L1 use in explaining the game, the result indicated significant difference [t = 0, p<0.01] that despite the learners’ expectation from their teachers to use L1 in explaining the game, teachers preferred being neutral. There is also significant difference [t= 0, p<0.01] on the views of two groups in respect to loving teachers due to the use of games in English lessons that the percentage of the learners is higher than the teachers on this issue. The t-test results with regard to the components of the language revealed significant differences [t = 0, p<0.01] except for speaking. Although the learners thought that learning how to read, listen and write in English besides developing their vocabulary knowledge through games were effective, the teachers preferred being neutral.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the results with regard to the use of games as a technique for language learning were mostly positive, which indicated how edutainment is more powerful for young learners than education. However, it is clear that the issue of speaking English should be handled carefully and comprehensively in language classes, as both learners and teachers agreed that children could not speak English comfortably when playing English games, which directs learners to move on the use of their L1. When we consider the positive effects of language games such as lowering learners’ anxiety and providing meaningful use of a language in the classroom, this result is striking and should be investigated in detail. Since the perspectives of learners and teachers might vary even about the specific issue such as learning English through games, teachers and researchers should conduct studies or action researches to examine learners’ views on several points to take into consideration when teaching a language and planning their lessons in a way that they meet their individual learners’ needs. If learners are children, language teachers should not ignore their natural instincts for games and they should seek for ways to turn education into edutainment.

References