

USING LANGUAGE GAMES AT ENGLISH
LESSONS IN IRAQ

doi: 10.34142/astreaa.2020.1.1.01

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ABSTRACT

This study assumes that the use of language games in the classrooms, especially at the primary level, impacts the learning process of pupils positively and makes the learning of a foreign language fun-filled and enjoyable. Games provide ample scope for interaction between pupils and teachers in Iraqi experience.

Games help to get rid of the monotony of learning topics in a foreign language like vocabulary and grammar, particularly in the primary section. Games can be used for a number of purposes. They initiate communication among pupils. They require the pupils to understand and follow the instructions of the teacher and to react to them verbally or in action. Games involve interaction between pupils and teachers. Both teachers and pupils can initiate talk and respond in turns. Oral communication is considered to be a weak area for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). In order to develop communications skills, there is a need to provide opportunities to pupils to communicate and interact with each other. While pupils are engaged in play, they use language without being conscious or worried about committing errors. Hence, they get plenty of opportunity for using language in real life situations. The rules and process of the game is their chief concern and language use and learning become incidental.

This study aims to investigate the impact of language games on English language acquisition. The assumption is that pupils benefit due to games and enjoy foreign language learning instead of taking it as a dull, meaningless activity. They are fully engaged in the game and consequently, fully involved in the process of language

learning actively. Different games are offered in the paper. Pupils playing games perform far better. Moreover, they enjoy language learning and prefer continue use of games. Planning, devising, selecting appropriate games are challenging for teachers. Pupils certainly benefit from the games, they enjoy the classes and show interests.

Games encourage pupils to interact meaningfully. There is greater freedom in the games class. The relationship between teachers and pupils is closer in the games class. Pupils in the games class are actively involved in learning. They use the target language meaningfully. They support each other during the games, they do not totally depend upon teachers but learn to support each other and work independently. There is more interaction between pupils and between teacher and pupils in the games class.

Key words: language game, English, classroom, lesson, primary school, Iraqi experience

АНОТАЦІЯ

Використання мовних ігор на уроках англійської мови в Іраку

У дослідженні осмислене концептуальне використання мовних ігор на занятті англійською мовою, особливо в початковій школі, що позитивно впливає на процес навчання учнів та робить її вивчення цікавим та приємним. Ігри дають широкі можливості для взаємодії між учнями та вчителями, про що свідчить досвід їхнього використання в Іраку.

Ігри допомагають позбутися монотонності вивчення будь-якої тем з англійської мови, як лексичного, так і граматичного матеріалу, особливо в молодших класах. Ігри можна використовувати для різних цілей. Вони сприяють спілкуванню учнів. Ігри допомагають учням розуміти та виконувати завдання вчителя, реагувати на них усно або через іншу діяльність. Ігри передбачають інтерактивну взаємодію учнів та вчителів. І вчителі, і учні можуть ініціювати комунікацію, розмову, відповідати по черзі. Усне спілкування традиційно вважається слабким місцем учнів, які вивчають англійську як іноземну. Для розвитку навичок спілкування необхідно забезпечити учням можливості спілкуватися та взаємодіяти одне з одним за допомогою гри. Поки учні захоплені грою, вони використовують англійську мову спонтанно, не турбуючись про власні помилки. Таким чином, вони отримують багато можливостей для використання англійської мови в реальних життєвих ситуаціях. Правила та процес гри є основним завданням при використанні гри, користування мовою у навчанні стає спонтанним.

Метою дослідження є дослідити вплив мовних ігор. Припущення полягає в тому, що школярі отримують користь завдяки іграм і насолоджуються вивченням англійської мови, а не сприймають навчання як нудну, безглузду діяльність. Учні повністю захоплюються грою і, отже, активно включаються в процес вивчення мови. У роботі пропонуються різні ігри. Учні, які грають в

ігри, навчаються набагато краще. Більше того, вони насолоджуються вивченням мови і завжди висловлюють бажання використовувати ігри. Планування, розробка, вибір відповідних ігор є складним завданням для вчителя. Учні, безумовно, отримують задоволення від ігор, вони насолоджуються уроками та проявляють власні інтереси.

Ігри спонукають учнів до змістовної взаємодії. У класі, в якому використовуються ігри, більше свободи. Відносини між вчителями та учнями більше щирі. Учні активно беруть участь у навчанні. Вони цілеспрямовано використовують англійську мову. Вони підтримують одне одного під час гри, виявляють самостійність, незалежність від вчителя при реалізації гри, вчаться підтримувати одне одного та працювати самостійно. У процесі гри спостерігається більше взаємодії між самими учнями і між вчителем та учнями.

Ключові слова: мовна гра, англійська мова, клас, урок, початкова школа, іракський досвід.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study.

The overall aim of education is to develop in students various life skills and give them knowledge that will make them responsible, independent and worthy citizens. The educational process begins at home. Children handle toys, help their parents, watch and listen to elders and through these incidents they acquire a certain degree of skills and gain some knowledge. Thus, it can be said that some learning takes place. This learning is neither intended nor deliberate. It happens naturally and unconsciously. This is called incidental learning. Children are not even aware that they are learning something. Hence, it does not create any burden on their minds. It is natural, wishful and part of living. Hence, it is enjoyable, satisfying and often fun-filled. Children in the age-group 5 to 12 years are very active, curious and thirsty for knowledge. They have tremendous grasping power. Every activity, every incident is a learning opportunity for small children. If this fact is taken as a base, one can create numerous deliberate learning opportunities for them. The reason for planning and providing opportunities is that incidental learning is not within control. Children are likely to acquire undesirable skills and acquire incorrect, incomplete knowledge which may be harmful to them.

Just as children learn from life situations, they learn from games and activities. Various social skills are inculcated through games. Learning through games is stress-free, unconscious, incidental, fun-filled and enjoyable. When children come together and play together, there is mental and physical involvement on their part. More important is their social involvement which demands interaction and communication. Communication takes place through language. Language is a medium for socialization. At the same time, the process of socialization creates an environment for language acquisition. Language is a social behaviour. So, it can be

concluded that language can be acquired through games. The first language or mother tongue is mostly learnt incidentally through games and other activities that children are engaged in. The researcher thought that if similar language learning situations based on games are created for second language (SL), second language learning can be made stress-free, enjoyable, incidental, fun filled and engaging for children at the primary level.

English as an international language has now been accepted by almost all nations across the world, including the most adamant ones. The language is well established as a language of business, commerce and trade and those who wish to thrive in the global competition are compelled to accept it whether they like it or not. No doubt the teaching of English as a foreign language has led to a great deal of academic research and discussion (Scott, & Ytrberg, 2001; Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2004). In order to ensure that children of the next generation do not lag in success merely because they do not know English, schools in non-English speaking countries have started giving education through English as a medium of instruction for all school subjects. Volumes of books are written; abundant research and experiments are conducted and the process continues with an aim to find a suitable method to teach English to EFL students. Till date, nobody has arrived at a satisfactory solution to the problems of English language teaching. Nor do we observe a satisfaction on part of students of EFL anywhere in the world, who honestly admit that they were taught English in the best way and do not encounter any problems with the language.

In many countries, the study of English starts from the pre-primary level so that children learn it at an early age, learning becomes natural to some extent, there is no apprehension about the new language and children do not become conscious regarding errors. It leads to a considerable degree of confidence on the part of learners.

Traditionally, English was taught through content. English literary pieces like essays, short stories and poems were selected and compiled in the form of a text book. Questions and exercises at the end were based on the selections to test the comprehension of students and to bring to their notice the important linguistic elements embedded in the content. Focus was almost equal on both aspects: language and literary sense. However, with passing years, it was realized that the purpose of learning English was to enable individuals to gain proficiency for business purposes and for oral and written communication. Achieving this objective through literature is a lengthy process; hence a more functional syllabus is preferred which caters to the practical needs of students. This idea was welcomed by learners initially and continues to do so. However, over a period it was realized that dealing with a purely linguistic syllabus becomes a dull and mechanical activity. Students, especially at the elementary level, find it meaningless.

Attempts have been made throughout history to make second language learning interesting, meaningful and fruitful especially in non-English speaking countries like Iraq, Iran, Japan, India and there are many more on the list. One must not

forget that the attitude of an individual towards a language depends upon the way he/she learns the language. If the early experience of second language learning is unpleasant, the students are likely to develop a permanent dislike for the language. Hence care must be taken at the primary level to make language learning as enjoyable as possible. Various methods and techniques have been developed to make the learning of English both fruitful and engaging. Methods and techniques change with changing age-groups.

There are many factors involved in English language teaching (ELT) in countries where English is not the mother tongue or first language, including Iraq. The government policies play an important role in the process. When the government supports the study of English, accepting it as inevitable and necessary for the progress of the nation, English finds its due place in the curriculum. Support is then provided by the government in various forms like providing material, technical support, training, library facilities etc. The schools and colleges at their own level also strive to promote ELT in every possible way.

The need for learning English as an international language for almost all things like business, education, social media etc is constantly increasing. The local languages used in Iraq are far different from English in every respect like sound system and sentence structure. The greater the differences in languages, the more difficult it is to transfer knowledge of one language to acquisition of the other. On the contrary, prior knowledge of a language causes interference in acquisition of a new language. These are common difficulties encountered by most people all over the world who learn English as a second or foreign language. Yet, nowadays, the established need for knowledge of English cannot be ignored. This has led to a body of research on second language teaching and learning. This fact gives rise to several issues like the specific reason for learning English, the age group of learners, available resources, preparation of teaching-learning material, and training of teachers and so on. The same material, the same methods cannot be suitable universally. Age of learners is also an important factor. Adult learners are self-motivated unlike young children. At the primary stage, children do not understand the importance of learning English as a second language. Struggling with new words and sentence patterns or sounds becomes a burden to them. They are likely to develop an aversion towards English and avoid it. If one waits for them to grow up and understand its importance, it becomes too late. The earlier one begins to learn a language the better the results are. The critical period hypothesis says that there is a period of growth in which full native competence is possible when acquiring a language. This period is from early childhood to adolescence. The critical period hypothesis has implications for teachers and learning programmes, but it is not universally accepted. The critical period hypothesis (CPH) claims that an optimal period for language acquisition ends at puberty (Lenneberg, 1967). That is why English is included as a school subject right from the pre-primary stage in most schools over the world, including Iraq. Entire education through English as the medium of

instruction is another preferred option. In both cases, learning a foreign language in a formal school environment becomes meaningless, stressful and burdensome to small children.

This is precisely the thought behind this research which attempts to investigate the impact of use of language games in a fourth level classroom to students in Iraq whose native language is not English.

AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The aim of the paper is to survey briefly the current educational scenario of teaching English in Iraq. The tasks are to show the nature of the curriculum, the status of English in the curriculum and a comparison of the old and new teaching methods employed for teaching English as a foreign language in Iraq, the significance of the study and theoretical background and examples of actual language games for teaching grammar, vocabulary and language skills.

METHODOLOGY

Methods of analysis, classification, and comparative analysis were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 Teaching English in Iraq

In Iraq, education is strictly under the control of the Iraqi government and is managed by Iraqi Ministry of Education. Education is free from primary level to doctorate level. There are private educational institutes, but they are very expensive. Education is given in both Arabic and English. Pre-primary education lasts until the child is 4-5 years old. Children are admitted in primary school on completing 6 years.

The educational system developed in Iraq during the British times, and it made extremely slow progress. The national government was formed under the British mandate in 1921, yet, education made little progress after that. Yet, it was a significant starting point and the British played an important role in shaping the current system of education.

Initially, English was restricted to towns for fear that it may lead to discontent if taught in every public school. English was introduced in the first year of primary school, but later taught in the fifth year of primary school, thus reducing English education by 4 years. Instead of teaching it as a second language it was taught as a foreign language. After the Revolution in 1958, the government adopted a more open educational policy at all levels.

Education is taken very seriously in Iraq in modern times. Primary education is free and compulsory. There is no selection process at any level. The Ministry of Education provides teacher training books and conducts a national level examination at the end of primary education level.

1.1.1. A Historical review

English was first taught in Iraq in state schools in 1873 in a few schools in major cities. After the First World War, during the expansion of primary education, English was begun to be taught in towns starting from first primary stage. Later, it

began to be taught from the fifth primary stage. Initially it was taught as a second language but later it was referred to as a foreign language. It followed the grammar translation method and the focus was on the written form. First, pronunciation and communications skills were neglected. Readymade materials like essays and letters were provided to the students and there was little scope for creativity. The teacher played a vital role and there was minimum involvement of students; they were mostly engaged in writing examinations. The material was imported from Egypt. The content in the books was the answer to ‘What to teach?’ There was no reference to ‘How to teach?’ The books contained reading texts, thus giving more importance to reading and writing. Listening and speaking skills were not given due importance. Most of the teaching material was prepared by the teachers so it was considered to be their property and the Ministry of Al-Maarif had no right to change it (Abdul-Kareem, 2009, p. 8). As a reaction to this condition, the Foreign Languages Department was established at the Higher Teacher’s Training College in Baghdad in the early 20th century. This paved the way for change in teaching of English in Iraq.

Teaching of English was started at the intermediate stage instead of the primary stage. This pattern continues till today. The series of books prescribed were The Oxford English Course for Iraq; gradually they were replaced by New English Course for Iraq. The latter series was written by Iraqi authors. The English courses in Iraq were thus nationalized and the Ministry of Education formed a committee to formulate the objectives of English teaching in Iraq. Since these books were prepared locally, the Ministry of Education held the rights to change them or modify them. (Abdul-Kareem, 2009, p. 7). In the last phase of development, the Kurdistan Regional Government took firm steps and in 2007, a complete English course called ‘Sunrise’ was incorporated in the curriculum. Iraq responded positively and actively to the demand of communication skills in English which has been accepted as the language for business, trade and education internationally. The new course gives equal importance to all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Language learning is different from language use. Learning takes place in many ways. Experience plays an important role in the process of learning a language. In Iraq, the chief source of English language was the English text books prepared by the government. The students use textbooks prepared and prescribed by the Ministry of Education for all levels. English is given due importance at the secondary level; consequently, less attention is given at the primary level. The text books were imported from Egypt. The grammar – translation method was used in the classrooms. In 1932, an American educational committee visited Iraq and it recommended the improvement of English language teaching in Iraq using better textbooks, and the recruiting of qualified teachers. In 1933-34 new text books were imported from Britain. Unfortunately, they were discarded within a year because

they were prepared specifically for British children, based on their native culture, tradition and vocabulary. Hence new modified books were introduced in 1935.

In accordance with the 1970 Committee's recommendations, a series of "The New English Course for Iraq" was produced and it was used in 1973. The first two texts, books 1 and 2, accompanied by Teacher's guides were designed and written for the fifth and sixth grades of primary schools for children whose ages ranged from ten to twelve years:

The writers of the texts have adopted the structural approach, which is thought to be the best method to ensure presentation and adequate choral repetition for many children. This series was introduced in 1981. The textbook VIII for the class 6th secondary level which is recently in use in Iraq, was the last textbook of this series.

1.1.2. Teaching Methods in Iraq: Old and New

The first ever method used for teaching English in Iraq was the Grammar-Translation Method. The syllabus was difficult even for teachers, so they had to depend upon readymade hand-outs. Teachers played the major role and used conventional methods like chalk and blackboard. The number of students in every class was huge. The environment was not appropriate for learning, especially language learning. Most of the teaching was exam oriented. The teachers themselves were not competent and could not speak fluently in English. Teachers dominated the classrooms and maintained complete control. They decided what to teach, how to teach, when to teach and so on. The classroom atmosphere was strictly disciplined. Pupils had little freedom and were so scared and had so little confidence that they rarely dared to ask questions. Punishment was severe. Pupils got little or no opportunity to use English as a target language. The teachers explained the meanings of words in the mother tongue (MT). They gave instructions in English and repeated them in the MT. Even in English classes, the MT was used to a great extent. Pupils invariably used the MT. They mostly repeated in chorus what the teachers said and rote learning of spelling and meaning was the system.

In recent times, with changes in the curriculum, there were changes in the methods of teaching. The students have started participating in classroom activities. The teacher-student ratio is controlled. Teachers have started using technology for teaching English. Students are at the centre and not teachers. One major problem, however, was the lack of training courses for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. M. Amin (2017) has noted that the courses conducted for teachers were not successful. The current English curriculum in Iraq is good enough to fulfil the demands of Iraqi EFL learners. There are slight differences in teaching English as a first language, second language, foreign language and English for specific purposes. Methods have to be changed according to the needs and teachers are gradually gaining awareness about these facts. More efforts are needed for effective teacher training courses, workshops and seminars and action research for discovering new innovative methods for EFL teaching-learning to make it more fruitful. This study is a modest step in the same direction.

1.1.3. Status of English in the Iraqi curriculum

In Iraq, the national language is Arabic since it is the language of Islam. English is studied as a foreign language. There is a difference between the two. A foreign language is a means to understanding the culture of another community unlike a second language which is used as an alternate means to express one's own culture. According to G. Ellis (1996), EFL is a part of the school curriculum, and therefore subject to contextual factors such as support from principal and the local community, government policy etc. A foreign language cannot be placed parallel to the user's language. Generally, people do not use a foreign language for creative purposes. There are some linguistic minorities in Iraq like the Turks and Kurds, but they all use Arabic. In Iraq, the study of English begins at the primary level and continues till post-graduation level. Although all four language skills are taught, there is no specific requirement for Iraqis to use English. English is taught as a compulsory subject in schools for 8 years. The course is general in nature. The core basics are taught initially and later, the content is modified according to the stream chosen by the students for higher education. English is the language of science and technology; hence, students feel that there is a need to know English in order to study these subjects.

The situation as it exists in Iraq is not uncommon; similar conditions are observed in almost every country where English is not a native language. Hence, teaching of English as a second or foreign language has gained much attention in recent decades. Research activities have increased in EFL and ELT especially in the countries in which the problem is experienced intensely. Problems of learners are best understood by natives of the land. Hence, research conducted by natives proves to make valuable contribution to EFL. These upcoming researchers get the benefit of resources like new theories in language learning and teaching, progress in technology, changing perspectives, revised approaches and methods and research activities in advanced nations. In modern times, the focus has shifted from teacher to learner. The role of the teachers has also undergone a change. Teachers are no longer expected to teach. They must play the role of facilitators and allow learning to take place on the part of learners.

Besides books or printed material that was the only sources available for language study, several audio video aids are available in plenty. These are more appealing and create a deeper impact on students. Readymade teaching aids are available in the markets which are attractive and durable. Language learning software is also very useful. As trends are changing, needs change. Language learning and teaching must change accordingly.

In this changing scenario of globalization, students have access to internet and knowledge on every subject. It is difficult to retain their interest in the classrooms that offer dull and dry lectures in grammar and vocabulary. Even before gaining the maturity of understanding how one can benefit from technology, they have mastered the technique of technology.

There is a need to think of ways to engage the modern students in language lessons. At the primary level, they learn English because it is compulsory. They are not old enough to realize its value. English is imposed upon them. Retaining their interest in something that is beyond their experience is difficult.

New strategies must be employed in primary classrooms that would make EFL learning a meaningful, interesting and enjoyable activity for students. What students love best is games and play. The researcher thought it would be worthy to exploit this tendency of the students constructively and use it as a means for teaching English as a foreign language in the classroom.

In current times, education has become learners centred. Students are no longer passive learners. In this context, it can be said that the best way to keep children active mentally and physically is to introduce games in the language classroom.

1.2. Significance of the Study

English is not the native language in Iraq; yet one must admit the need to learn it in the present scenario of globalization. There is a vast difference in Arabic, the local language in Iraq on the one hand and English on the other. The sound system is different, the script is different, and the sentence structures are different. This makes it difficult for Iraqi students to learn English and use it for communicative purposes. According to Krashen's Critical Age Hypothesis, the earlier one begins to learn a language, the better. English is introduced in Iraq at the primary stage. The aim is to familiarize children at a young age to a new language so that they acquire it easily. A lot of research has been conducted on second language teaching particularly in English because since it has been accepted as an international language, it must be taught in hundreds of countries where it is a no-native language. Yet, no method has emerged as a reliable, effective and all-purpose method that has fulfilled the needs of all aspirants who wish to learn English for several purposes.

Researchers all over the world continue to carry out experiments and find out methods of teaching-learning English to suit the needs of learners. In many countries including Iraq, English is a medium of instruction for all subjects in school. Yet, one cannot ignore that age is an important factor in language learning. It is only at a later stage in life; after a certain degree of maturity is reached that people understand the need and importance of learning English. Although they are motivated to do so from within, it is rather late for learning a new language and they must put in a lot of efforts especially for developing communication skills in English. Regarding Krashen's theory of Critical Age Hypothesis, it is advisable to begin at an early age; however, young learners are not aware of the importance of English at that age and often find it a burden. At the primary level, many children are yet in the process of acquiring the first language or their mother tongue.

When a second language is introduced simultaneously, it poses several problems. Language, unlike other school subjects, is a skill-based subject. Language is learnt through imitation. Children in Iraq are not given enough exposure to English hence

they do not have much scope for imitation. Moreover, the model provided for imitation must be correct and standard. Due to lack of competent teachers, one cannot be sure that standard and correct English is available for imitation. Errors made by teachers and instructors are thus perpetuated, bringing down the overall quality of English.

Exposure to language provides language input which is processed in the brain. As a result of this processing, human beings can understand the principles and parameters of a particular language (Chomsky, 1959). As far as English is concerned, there is limited exposure in Iraq; hence, there is insufficient input available for processing. With inadequate input, children are unable to decide the principles and parameters of English and thus find it difficult to learn the language. One must not forget that children in primary schools in Iraq are compelled to bilingualism. They must process the inputs of their mother tongue and English simultaneously.

Linguists generally agree that the first language or mother tongue (MT) is acquired in a natural way. Here, Chomsky differentiates between language acquisition and language learning. While language acquisition is natural, unconscious and motivated by the urge to satisfy basic human needs, language learning is deliberate, purposeful and conscious. This fact is very important in second language learning. The MT is acquired while a SL is learnt. The ideal way would be to create situations in which the second language can also be acquired naturally like the first language.

It must also be remembered that a first language is always first and a second is always second. The moment we talk of second language, we take for granted the knowledge of one language previously known to the learner. At the time of acquiring the first language, the mind is a blank slate; at the time of learning the second language, the knowledge of one language exists in the mind. The learner is bound to compare and contrast the two languages which hamper the natural process of acquiring a language. L. Cameron (2001) and S. House (1997) claim that the first language is bound to influence the learning of a second or foreign language. Considering all the above factors, the researcher concluded that language games would address most of the issues concerned.

1. In accordance with the Critical Age Hypothesis, the study plans an experiment for fourth grade primary level students. The fourth grade particularly marks a transition point from the lower to the upper primary level in the Iraqi educational system. The purpose of English learning may not perhaps succeed in case of very small children, hence the fourth-grade children who are in the last phase of lower primary education are matured enough for the experiment, hence suitable for the study.

2. The idea is to expose children to English. Students involved in games are not only exposed but immersed in real life social situations thus giving both, opportunities for amassing language input and opportunity for using the new language in real life contexts.

3. Playing language games creates an informal environment. It is closer to real life situations, like natural situations in which the MT is acquired.

4. Language learning becomes incidental rather than intentional when it happens through games.

5. Not just children, but people of all age groups generally like to play games. Children enjoy playing games so this tendency can be utilized for introducing English.

6. Games played under the supervision of the teacher or instructor will ensure that ideal, standard and correct input is given to the learners. It will also take care that children do not learn undesirable and anti-social behaviours. The quality of the content provided will be maintained.

7. Games played in a classroom situation affect the atmosphere and promote healthy interaction among participants.

8. Games have rules and specified goals which make them meaningful and challenging.

It is true that several experiments in language games have been carried out in order to teach different language skills at various levels of education. However, this study aims at devising games for Iraqi EFL learners at the fourth primary grade for reasons specified above. This study does not merely intend to prove the impact of use of language games; it has devised special games for fourth grade primary students in Iraq as per their interests. The method is learner-centred. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator. It promotes active learning on the part of students. Hundred per cent participation and involvement of learners is ensured. Hence, the method is in line with modern trends in education where the focus has shifted from teacher to learner, from passive to active learning and from teacher to facilitator.

The researcher has a firm belief that this study will prove to be effective and beneficial to students as well as teachers.

The additional aspect of this study is that it tries to understand the opinion of teachers regarding use of language games for teaching English in primary school in Iraq. The study also tries to identify the disadvantages, drawbacks or limitations of the experiment if any.

Young and old, all people like to play games. Children especially love to play. In case of children playing proves to be a learning experience although learning takes place incidentally. Playing also promotes their growth and development. For example, if kids play in the sand, they experience the touch and feel of sand, understand its texture and its nature and soon discover that they can construct sand castles on the beach. When they play with a ball, the actions of throwing and catching help to develop their muscles and enable motor development. Running, jumping, skipping are all responsible for their physical development. As children grow older, games take the place of play. Play is free, without any specific objectives. On the other hand, games are more organized and systematic. Games have specific goals like catching someone or making someone out or hitting someone with a ball etc. Points

can be assigned to performance in games. Hence a spirit of competition is created. Children try to do their best. When children learn what they have to achieve in a game, they get engaged in the game. Games require interaction and communication hence; they are compelled to use language.

Games provide opportunity for communication and use of language. This is how language develops through games. Games can be played against single opponents or against an opponent team. Team games foster values like team spirit, sharing, cooperation, coordination, thinking about others, predicting, calculations, estimate, problem solving, and socialization and so on. The last one is important because when children play together, they must communicate with each other. This communication takes place in language. It provides children an opportunity to use language in real life situations. They struggle to express themselves in the best way when they are making some point in the game or expressing their opinion.

The researcher felt that using games in EFL classrooms especially in primary classes in Iraq would help to get rid of the existing monotony of traditional teaching methods and provide opportunity to students to use language and communicate in an activity that they enjoy as children. Hence the researcher decided to study the impact of games in EFL classrooms upon the interaction between students and learning on their part.

Several studies have been conducted on the use of games in EFL primary classes. The focus of this study is dual; the primary focus is on the interaction triggered by games among students and the second factor is the extent of learning that takes place through games in primary classes in Iraq. The study is particularly relevant in the Iraqi context where the tedious grammar-translation method was the chief method of teaching English. The ultimate aim is to make language classes livelier and more meaningful for primary students and enable them to master communication skills through fun and enjoyable games. Games bring diversity in teaching methods in order to sustain the interest of students.

The additional value of this study is that it focuses on all the four language skills. Games activities have been specially designed to address all the four language skills. The study gives importance to practicality of games. Hence, the researcher has given a detailed description of selective games that serve the purpose of developing the 4 language skills. Instead of just talking about the advantages of games and their utility in language teaching, the researcher has suggested games that can be played in language classrooms in real life situations. The games support the theory discussed.

1.3. Operational Terms

The researcher has used several terms in the study which need to be clearly defined and discussed in detail.

- **Impact:** Impact refers to the extent and way in which learning of English is affected by using language games in the classroom. The students in the control group will be taught using the conventional method, without using games. The

comparison of performances of students in the control group and experimental group will point out the impact of language games in the EFL classroom. The difference in both classrooms and classroom interaction will also be suggestive about the impact of language games.

- **Pupil learning:** Student learning refers to the new skills and knowledge acquired by a pupil either incidentally in an informal situation, unconsciously or consciously through deliberate effort in a formal classroom situation.

- **Games:** According to D. Byrne (1995) a game is a form of play governed by rules. It is a diversion, a break from routine activities and is fun. The rules must be clear and well-defined. The dictionary meaning of 'game' is 'an activity that one engages in for engagement or fun'. A game poses a challenge to achieve an objective and win. Games can be played by single individuals or by teams; there are indoor games or outdoor games.

- **Language games:** Games incorporated with language elements devised and implemented for the purpose of conveying the language elements to learners.

- **Language skills:** The four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Generally, researchers target one or maximum two language skills in a study. However, it is indicated in this study that language games can cater to the development of all four language skills. This happens rarely because listening and reading are receptive skills, and speaking and writing are productive skills. Reading and writing are advanced skills; they are man-made and require the knowledge of graphics in addition to listening and speaking.

1.4 Theoretical Background

1.4.1 Language Learning

Learners begin by transferring the sounds and meaning, words order into the learning of the second language. In this process, he experiences obstruction. The learner happens to confuse the grammatical rules of both the languages. He makes efforts to transfer knowledge of one language to the other. When learning a second language, a learner uses this language transfer concept as a strategy to simplify the language learning process. Learners when presenting or expressing their ideas, opinions and statements in the target language, tend to consider and apply the same grammatical structures of their first language; this transferring interferes with the proper application of the grammatical structure of the target language.

Language is a system and it consists of many other systems. There is a system at the level of sounds, words and sentences. The tendency of a second language learner is to impose the systems in the MT upon the target language. The language thus produced can be incorrect, unintelligible and ambiguous.

1.4.2 Socio-cultural theory

The Sociolinguistic theory is concerned with the effect of all aspects of society in the learning process of the target language such as cultural norms, expectations and context on the way language is applied. It also considers the different types of language variation, ethnicity, religion, status, gender, level of language knowledge

and how all these factors have an impact on second language learning process. The Acculturation Model which is a likely reason for the failure of second language competence refers to the process of adjustment to a new culture, on how new language learners acclimatize not only to the target language but also to the culture of that language. This model refers to immigrants that are in second language surroundings, but it could also apply to new language learners and the way it affects them to also acquire a new culture. For some learners the idea of modifying and adding another culture in their life could cause difficulties in their language learning process.

In order to devise ways of teaching language it is first necessary to understand how languages are learnt. Moreover, it is necessary to understand that there is a difference in learning a first language and a second language. At the same time, some linguists like B. Skinner (1957) and R. Lado (1964) are of the opinion that learning first and second languages is similar, that the same process takes place in both cases. Some linguists believe that language learning is an individual matter. Every normal individual is born with a capacity to acquire language. He processes the language input to which he is exposed and can produce that language. Chomsky's views are in line with the cognitive approach (Chomsky, 1959). The second approach to language learning is the socio-cultural approach proposed by L. Vygotsky (1978). L. Vygotsky (1978) believes that socio-cultural aspects may influence cognition at the individual level. Vygotsky was a psychologist and he was the first to propose the socio-cultural theory.

This theory has contributed substantially to classroom interaction. This theory emphasizes the interaction between individual and society which forms the basis for language acquisition. (Wells, & Chang-Wells, 1992). L. Vygotsky (1978) gave much importance to the socio-cultural theory pointing out the role of communication, interaction and instruction in language development. He pointed out that speech is the primary medium of learning. This is supported by Britton's (1970) view that an infant learns by talking and learns to talk by talking. Oyler (1996) argued that by talking, children become producers of knowledge and not just consumers. Vygotsky (1978, p. 53) states that language is a symbolic cultural tool and plays an important role in the cognitive development of children. Speech coupled with practical activity brings about intellectual development (Vygotsky, 1986, pp. 24–27).

Corden (2000) in his book titled "Literacy and Learning through Talk" pointed out the importance of talk in a classroom. Storch (2007) investigated the merits of pair work in ESL classroom and discovered that talk during pair work facilitates learning. To conclude, it can be said that language is a social behaviour. Classroom interaction promotes language learning. If coupled with activities and games, it provides opportunities for cognitive development. Although every individual has the ability to acquire a language, language learning takes place through social interaction. The researcher believes that games create a social language learning environment in a classroom.

1.4.3. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky (1978) also believed that every individual has a certain level of performance. There is a need to take the individual to the next step, which is what we call development. This task is carried out by the teacher. The teacher facilitates the learner in such a way that the learner reaches the next level of performance, and thus enhancing it. The gap between the actual performance level and the next one is termed as the Zone of Proximal development. Vygotsky has defined it in the following words, “The distance between the actual development level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) Peer actions are active during games. Language performance can also improve while interacting with peers during games. Vygotsky rightly pointed out the relationship between socio-cultural and cognitive factors. Vygotsky considers the ZPD as an appropriate starting point for learning. It considers what the child already knows and proceeds to build upon prior knowledge. The support provided for reaching the next level is called scaffolding. Van Lier (1996) argued that this support does not necessarily come from teachers. It can come from adults or peers. The peers may be less capable or more capable. This cannot be ensured in a classroom situation. It does not necessarily facilitate language learning. In an interactive situation, peers share their strengths and weaknesses. However, the researcher thinks that incorrect language input is also valuable. It is part of learning content. Gradually, a learner can differentiate between correct and incorrect language as he begins to process the input and realizes the principles and parameters of that language. This fact rules out any objection to peer interaction in classroom during games. It is in favour of this study. One cannot ensure that standard and or model input will be received by a learner while playing games.

But Chomsky considers all kinds of language input as valuable. It is necessary for language learning. Whatever support is received by learners during interaction that takes place through games proves and a scaffold for reaching the next step. The researcher wants to point out at this point that as far as language learning is concerned, every kind of input is a scaffold and takes the learner to the next stage. This does not hold true for other subjects like social sciences. Hence, language games in primary EFL classrooms can be most successful as scaffolds, as means for bringing about interaction, as a medium for socialization and as a platform for communication.

1.4.4. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

Second Language (SL) learners who begin to learn the SL at an earlier age outperform those who begin at a later stage (Vanhove, 2013). The CPH is often applied to SL and FL acquisition. It states that susceptibility or sensitivity to language input varies with age. Adult learners are less susceptible to language input. The capacity or ability to learn a language is not affected by age; it is the attitudes,

experiences and maturity that influence language acquisition at an adult stage. Lenneberg marked the critical period from 2 years to puberty (around 14 years). Lenneberg is the father of CPH. Some researchers do not consider any starting age for acquiring a language. It may start at birth. Some others believe that for certain aspects of language like phonetics, it ends earlier than puberty (Vanhove, 2013).

There is no onset age for learning language and that offset for learning phonetics / phonology is one year. Lenneberg's CPH supports Noam Chomsky's concept of the biological basis of language capacities. Chomsky believed that human beings are born with a language acquisition device (LAD) which includes a set of rules called Universal grammar (UG). Hence, people can acquire language at any point in their lifetime if they are exposed to enough and appropriate input. It is on this point that Lenneberg and Chomsky differ in their views. "The one qualification that might be entered with regard to such evidence is that deprivation of language input during the phase in a child's life when cognitive development is at its most intense may have quite general psychological/cognitive effects, and that it may be these general effects that are reflected in later language development rather than effects relating specifically to a critical period for language" (Singleton, 1989, p. 54).

Lenneberg firmly believed that a CP exists in case of language acquisition. To put it in other words, the ability to acquire language is critically linked to age. There is an ideal time-span in which language / languages can be learnt. After this critical period, it is difficult (not impossible) to learn language / languages. During the critical period, native like achievement of grammatical functions is possible. On the basis of the above discussion it can be concluded that birth to 12 years is a sensitive period for learning languages in a native-like way. This is also the period when children engage in constructive games.

1.5. Games for teaching-learning

Young and old all like to play games. Games and play are part of the lives of children and play an important role in their overall development. As children grow up, they continue to play but the nature of games changes. In early childhood children play randomly but around middle school, games take place of play. Games are more organized, systematic and governed by rules. There is a definite goal or challenge to be achieved. In team games, participants are compelled to work together and communicate with each other. Games are played in an informal setting hence children speak without being conscious.

The nature of language classrooms has changed today. In a conventional classroom, students are passive listeners while teachers play an important role. Teaching is limited to disseminating information and students are expected to memorize it. They reproduce from memory what they get from teachers. Nowadays, the teacher's role has changed from teacher to facilitator the facilitator is expected to create a learning environment in the classroom. Children learn independently as per their pace and understanding. They are involved actively in the learning process. Playing

games keeps them active (Sugar, 1998, p. 3). It is necessary to use diverse teaching methods in order to sustain the interest of children and keep them motivated.

The most important reason why people learn a language is to be able to use it real life situations. Games provide real life situations for learners to practice communication skills. In games, learners assume an important role rather than the teacher. Teachers step out of the frontline. This helps to boost the confidence of students (Langran, & Purcell, 1994, p. 12–14). Games expose learners to a variety of language situations feeding them with fresh, new and substantial language input. Learners keep their minds open for language experiences. Experience is strengthened by the emotional involvement of learners because games are associated with feelings like happiness, satisfaction, competition, excitement, amusement and suspense.

While playing games, children react spontaneously to situations without being conscious about commitment of errors. Children open without being shy. The emphasis is not on fluency. The focus is fluency and not grammar (Langran, & Purcell, 1994, p. 12–14). Games can be combined with other teaching methods to create diversity. Many children complained about the lack of diversity and expressed their desire to include more variety, diversity and fun in the learning process.

Finally, it can be said that many changes are taking place in society. The family structure has changed. Absence of grandparents in most homes has compelled schools to take the responsibility of teaching moral values to children. There are more expectations from school. Parents are busy and have little time to spare for the children. Children also have a fixed schedule in the competitive world in which they have little time for fun and games. Hence, if games are organized in school, they will not miss the fun. Games are preferable to technological devices like mobile phones, tabs and iPads which children find more interesting. Lack of physical movement in children who indulge in digital games and media can lead to serious health problems (Mashedier, 1989, p. 3). Children are losing social skills on account of technology (Cole, Cole, & Lightfoot, 2005, p. 536). Team games are a good way of socialization and a platform for developing and practising social skills.

1.5.1. Language Games

Language games in this study refer to indoor or outdoor games and individual or team games but they must be designed to convey some aspect of a language. However, the aim of some language games is merely to provide scope for interaction. Hadfield (1984) distinguished them as linguistic games and communication games. There is a large variety of language games:

1. Find the treasure
2. Miming
3. Role play
4. Guessing games
5. Sorting, arranging and ordering games

6. Matching games
7. Board games like scrabble
8. Jig-saw puzzles
9. Matching games
10. Following instructions

The teacher must select suitable game type depending on the objective of the lesson. A game of hide-and-seek can also prove to be an effective game for bringing about interaction and communication. Different types of games suit different age groups. Team games that pose challenges are often preferred by children because they have an urge to compete and win (Nalasco and Arthur, 1991, p. 76). Repeating language elements of a target language can become dull and mechanical; if the language elements are incorporated in a game, it is repeatedly played and enjoyed by children. A game provides relaxation from serious learning. Real learning takes place in a relaxed atmosphere. When introduced through games, children realize that language is much more than a list of words and rules.

1.5.1.1. Advantages of language games

Language games in a classroom have many advantages. Uberman (1998, p. 20) asserts that 'games encourage, entertain, teach and promote fluency'. Games keep the students engaged and active. Everyone can participate in the games. Games ensure active involvement in the learning process. Games are motivating and fun filled. Games help to create interest in learning. Games provide a natural real-life situation for language learning. Along with interaction and communication, they enable students to build relationships with each other. They accelerate the process of socialization. They break the routine by providing a variety of activities. They provide an opportunity to students to assume roles and responsibilities thus increasing their confidence level. Games are valuable for language learning because they can be modified and adjusted to suit age, level and interests of learners. Games serve as a springboard for serious language work.

1.5.1.2. Selecting Language Games

Teachers have to select games for a language classroom very judiciously. Some games include a lot of fun but are not packed with enough language elements. The aim is to convey language elements and bring about language learning on the part of students. Hence, games that provide mere fun should be avoided. A good game is one that balances fun, challenge and learning (Sugar, 1998). All games are not suitable for a classroom environment. Moreover, all games do not suit all age groups. Games utilized in a classroom for educational purposes must not lead to unhealthy competition, rivalry or too much excitement. A game that can be perfect for one group of students may be terrible for another.

Games must be properly implemented in the class with strict monitoring by the teacher. Rules must be made clear in the beginning. Any issues that may arise must be solved immediately. The game should not take any turns and end up farcically with ill feelings for each other. The sporting spirit must be maintained till the end.

The teacher must make sure that the objectives of playing the game are fulfilled. It should not prove to be a waste of time and energy.

After the game is played, the teacher can discuss it with the students as a kind of evaluation of the activity. This will help to modify any step in the game to make it a better experience the next time (Langran, & Purcell, 1994, p. 15–19).

There can be problems in conducting language games in large classes. Every student may not get a chance to participate. Availability of space and classroom management is other problems. Sometimes, learners use their MT while playing and this may hamper learning the new language (Brumfit et al, 1991). At the same time, some socio-cultural researchers like Anton and Dicamilla (1999) argue that use of MT supports the learning of a new language. Cook (2001) claimed that MT can be used for managing the class. According to Langran and Purcell (1994), choosing appropriate language games, managing the class and conducting the games successfully can be challenging to inexperienced teachers. A teacher may set a particular task with some intention but students may use some other simple strategy to perform the task in a way that does not fulfil the intended objective. Most people believe that language games are to be played outside the educational set up. There is a need to convince parents and people in general that language games can be used for teaching as an effective method in the classroom setting.

1.5.1.3. Game Categories

Games can be categorized in number of ways. Games can be played by single individuals. Games can be played in pairs or in groups. In individual games, the task is to be completed by each individual independently. The judgment usually depends upon the time in which the task is completed. The same technique applies to pairs, with the difference that students work in pairs instead of alone. In group games, the task is assigned to an entire group. In team games, two or more teams are set against each other. Games can also be classified as competitive games and co-operative games. The latter promote cooperation among participants to complete a task while the former pose a challenge that motivates the participants to excel and put up their best efforts. In cooperative games, the concern is not whether one wins or loses but it is the learning process (Mashed, 1989, p. 1).

Games are divided into the following categories: introduction games, group games, physical games, word games, story games, question games, scavenger hunt games etc.

Language games can be categorized according to the language skill that they focus on. There are listening games, speaking games, reading games and writing games. Games can be devised for specific purposes like grammar games and vocabulary games. Language games can be simple paper and pencil games or team games that involve a lot of physical movement and activity.

1.6. Games for language learning

1.6.1. Vocabulary games

a) There are some pairs of words that always go together or example, ‘cup and saucer’ or ‘shoes and socks’. The teacher prepares paper chits equal to the number of students in the class. The teacher writes one word in each pair of words on each chit. The chits are randomly distributed to the students. Each student goes around finding the student who has got the chit with the appropriate word that goes with the word on his chit. Then the students read out the pairs of words aloud so that all the students understand the pairs of words that go together. The same game can be played for collocation of words.

b) The teacher assigns the roles of kitchen, drawing room, bedroom, garden etc. to different students. They wear placates in their neck so that others know what their role is. Each of the remaining students in the class gets a chit with a word written on it for example, chair or spoon. Each student reads the word and goes and stands behind the student wearing the concerned placate. For example, the student who gets the chit for ‘spoon’ will stand behind ‘kitchen’ and so on. Then each student in each line reads out the word on the chit. This enables all the children to know what is kept in each room or part of the house. This is an interesting way to enrich vocabulary. There is another way of playing this game. It is called ‘mail game’. The teacher prepares the mail or envelopes. Each envelop is labelled with words like kitchen, bedroom etc. The names of things found in different parts of a house are written on pieces of paper and distributed to the participants. The participants put the piece of paper in the appropriate envelop.

c) One student opens a chit and enacts before the others some actions that should lead the others to guess the correct word. This game can be played by dividing the class into groups, setting a time limit for guessing each word and allotting marks to each group for the correct responses. This can be played as a competitive game between groups rather than on individual basis. Students should be allowed to discuss with their group members before they respond.

d) There are some paper and pencil games for individual play like filling in the missing letters, correcting mis-spelt words or making meaningful words from a given big word or from a set of letters provided. Word puzzles with clues also keep students engaged and they help to develop the vocabulary of students.

e) This game is called “Who am I?” Students are divided into two groups. One student from a group comes forward and enacts a profession. Students from the other group guess the name of the profession. They can be given limited number of chances or limited time. The groups take turns for asking questions and guessing answers. The group that has more guesses wins.

f) The teacher throws a pen and says a word. Any student who manages to catch the pen says a word starting with the last letter of the word said by the teacher. The student throws the pen and the next student who catches it begins a word with the last letter of the word said by the previous student and so on.

g) Finding the partner: The teacher prepares a set of chits and one word is written on each chit. There is another set of chits on which the collocations of the words in the first list are written. The chits are randomly distributed among the pupils. They are given a time limit within which they have to find the correct partner. Then both partners read out the word on their chit. This game is part of the current study.

1.6.2. Listening games

a) A very commonly played listening game is ‘Simon says...’ The teacher gives some instructions one after another and begins every instruction with the words ‘Simon says’. The students follow the instructions and act accordingly. They are supposed to follow only those instructions that start with ‘Simon says’. Once in a while, the teacher should give the instruction without beginning with ‘Simon says’. Students who still follow the instructions are out of the game.

b) A similar kind of game is ‘Walking the line’. The teacher gives the instructions in the target language. Students stand in a line and follow the instructions. For example, the teacher would say, “walk backwards” and the students listen and walk backwards. These listening games are in accordance with the method called Total Physical Response (TPR). The students listen to language. It becomes their input through exposure in a real-life setting. They get sufficient time to listen and understand a language before they attempt to produce it. By the time they are prepared to use it, they are quite confident (Freeman, 2000, p. 108–111).

c) Agree / Disagree: The teacher makes some statements on controversial issues deliberately using lengthy sentences and complex structures. Students listen carefully. The teacher asks how many agree to the statements and how many don’t. The students have to answer within a minute. Then the teacher asks some students to justify their answer in brief. This game is part of the experiment.

d) Two Truths, One Lie

Each student should write three facts about themselves on a piece of paper. Two of the facts should be the truth, and one should be a lie. Students read aloud the facts, and give the other students a chance to question them and decide which statement is a lie.

1.6.3. Communication games

a) Treasure Hunt: This is a very interesting game enjoyed by young and old alike. The teacher shows an object to all the participants and then hides it. The students have to find it with the help of clues provided by the teacher. The clues are given in the target language. Some clues are oral and some are written. Students discuss among themselves, analyse the clues, brainstorm and find the hidden object. It includes thinking and problem solving. This game gives plenty of opportunities for communication. The game is so engaging that students are encouraged to speak or respond without bothering about errors or without

becoming conscious. Occasionally, the peers correct them or teachers may correct them if it hampers the game.

b) Dictation partners: In this game students make pairs. They have to sit far from each other anywhere in the classroom. One student from each pair utters a word or sentence. His partner has to concentrate and listen to him in spite of the din and write down the words or sentences. They can take turns at dictating and taking down dictations.

c) Who is telling the truth? Each student writes 3 facts about himself / herself which nobody else knows about. The students write their names on the chits and submit them to the teacher. The teacher calls 3 students to the front of the class and reads out a fact one at a time. Other students ask questions to the three students and try to guess the facts related to each of them.

d) Secret word: Each student is given a secret word. Each student makes a small speech that contains the word. After one round, they take a second round of giving a speech. This continues till the other students guess the secret word hidden in the speech of each student.

e) **I Have Never...** : All students in the class should start holding five fingers in the air (this number can be adjusted depending on how many students are in the class). The student who begins the activity will tell the class one thing that he/she has NEVER done. The students who have done that activity should put a finger down, and tell the class a story about this activity.

1.6.4. Grammar games

a. Guess the noun: Create a Powerpoint presentation with one noun on each slide. One student sits with his back to the ppt and other students describe the noun to him until he guesses it. Students take turns at describing and guessing.

b. Maximum guesses: Students pick one chit from a pile and each one has a noun written on it. Each student describes the noun and gives clues until somebody guesses it. The student who gives the correct answer gets the chit. The student who collects the maximum number of chits is the winner.

1.6.5. Writing games

There is a general tendency on the part of ESL or EFL learners to avoid writing. Writing skill is the most demanding language skill that requires deep concentration, attention, reflection besides following the rules of writing, being particular about spellings and so on. Written content becomes documentary evidence of performance which creates a fear in the mind of students, so they avoid it unless they are very confident. Yet, writing is an essential skill and cannot be ignored.

Jig-Saw Puzzles:

Participants assemble pieces of a jigsaw puzzle of a world-famous landmark such as the Eiffel Tower, Mt. Fuji the Great Wall, etc).

Then they describe the image in five sentences to complete the task.

This game encourages students' productive skills and elicits their speech fluency. Cross-culture concepts are also addressed. The number, the length, and the patterns

of sentence can vary depending on the students' language ability and linguistic points the instructor would like to reinforce.

What's the Number?

Participants use the four basic operations (addition, subtraction, division and multiplication) to compute a simple mathematical equation provided orally by the instructor.

They call out the correct answer as soon as possible.

This game addresses students' listening skills and tests their understanding of numbers, which is often an important part of language teaching materials.

Story Time

Participants pick and listen to a tape randomly selected containing a spoken excerpt of a well-known children's story, such as the Snow White, the Ginger Bread Man, etc.

After listening to the entire excerpt, competitors correctly identify the title of the story from a provided list.

The recorded stories are all classical bedtime stories for young children and have been translated into most of the major languages worldwide. Students should be familiar with those stories. This game focuses on gist-listening skills. Students only need to catch the key terms to figure out what the story is.

Art Master

The instructor describes a picture orally. Competitors simultaneously recreate the picture on a sheet of paper, correctly including named objects in accurate positions. This game reinforces the use of prepositions, such as to the right of, to the left of, in the middle of, or under, etc. It also reinforces the vocabulary of concrete objects students have already learned before. The complexity of the picture will depend on the level of the students.

What's Cooking?

Participants read a recipe and make the dish.

The amount of ingredients and assembly process must follow exactly the instructions laid out in the recipe. The participants eat the dish they have prepared, all together and as fast as possible, because whoever finishes the five tasks first wins the entire competition.

This game not only reinforces food vocabulary, but it also tests the ability of students to comprehend written instructions. This is also good for introducing cross-culture topics. Recipes may vary depending on what food terms and cultures the teachers wish to cover. Salads and sandwiches are easy-to-prepare recipes. The eating part adds an additional element of fun to the game.

1.7. The most popular games

Game 1: Gesture Game:

Aim: Teaching English alphabet

Materials: One soft ball

Procedure: Children stand in a circle. One child holds the ball and starts saying the letters in the alphabet. He passes the ball after saying 2 or 3 letters and passes the ball to the next pupil. He continues where the previous one stopped and says the next few letters and then passes the ball again to the next pupil. In this way, the pupils say the letters and go on passing the ball until they reach the letter 'z'. The pupil who says the letter 'z' is the winner and gets a prize. He starts the next round. Then they start all over again from a, b, c, d,

Game 2: Vocabulary game

Aim: Revising vocabulary

Materials: Picture cards and word cards, colours, glue etc.

Procedure: Each group prepares 2 sets of cards. One set has words written on them and the other set has pictures that correspond to the words in the other set. This has additional advantages since writing the spellings, discussing the meanings etc. brings about interaction among pupils in the group. They consult each other, check each other or find words and meanings from resources. They share the work of drawing and colouring and writing out the words.

All the groups place their cards upside down on a table. The pupils pick up one card from each set. If the picture happens to match the word, they keep the cards. If not, they place the cards again upside down. The pupil who collects the maximum number of cards is the winner.

Game 3: Action game

Aims: Learning to greet and naming

Materials: a soft ball, a small drum or clapper

Procedure: The first part of this game serves the purpose of modelling while the second part is practice or drilling. The pupils stand in a semi-circle. The teacher goes to each pupil, shakes hands and greets him / her. "Hello, my name is" Followed by the teacher asking "How are you?" and the pupil answering "I'm fine, thank you."

In the next part, the pupils stand in 2 rows facing each other (20 pupils in each row). One pupil begins as he holds the ball in his hand. He introduces himself and throws the ball to any pupil in the opposite row. That pupil responds to him by telling his name etc. and greeting him in an appropriate manner. Then he throws the ball to anyone in the opposite row and greets him. This continues till all pupils get a chance.

Game 4: Spelling game

Aim: To memorize spellings

Materials: A box full of English letters and a chart with various picture pasted on it.

Procedure: Pupils are divided into 8 groups of 5 each. Each group is given a chart of pictures and a box containing English letters. The pupils work together and spell out words and label all the pictures on the chart. This game is also beneficial.

It requires pupils to discuss the names of the words and spell them out, bringing about a great deal of communication.

Game 5: Puzzle

Aim: Learning vocabulary

Procedure: A puzzle is given with vertical and horizontally arranged boxes. Clues to words are given in the form of pictures. The pupils have to spell the names of the given pictures and fit the letters in the appropriate boxes to complete the puzzle. Here, the teacher has to give clear instructions, in the mother tongue if necessary so that pupils can follow them and do the task.

Game 6: Spot the difference

Aim: Revising vocabulary

Materials : Picture cards, notepads

Procedure: Pupils are divided into pairs. Each pair is given 2 pictures. The picture are almost similar but there are some differences. The pupils have to find the differences and note them down on the notepad provided.

Game 7 : Role Play

Aim: Teaching action words (verbs)

Procedure: One pupil stands in the middle of a circle made by other pupils. The pupil in the middle performs some action and the others have to observe, guess and name the action. Sometimes, the teacher dictates which action is to be performed or sometimes, pupils select a card and mime the action mentioned on it.

CONCLUSION

A number of games addressing all four language skills are described in this paper. The games can be played in the same way or the teachers can make minor changes or modifications to suit the purpose. One or more language skills can be covered in the same game. The teacher can implement games depending upon the focus of the skill / skills to be developed through them. Resourceful teachers can take ideas from the above-mentioned games and prepare their own games.

This paper describes the theoretical background, contains a brief historical overview of the educational system in Iraq, the position of English as an EFL in the curriculum and the conventional methods followed for teaching English. The researcher has argued with conviction the use of games for teaching English at the primary level in Iraqi schools.

The paper specifies clearly the meaning and concept of games, language games, their advantages and disadvantages in addition to the description of certain games and how they are played in a classroom setting. The types and categories are also mentioned. Operational definitions of important terms used in the report are included in this paper.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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Received: 15.12.2019

Accepted: 25.01.2020

Cite this article as:

Al-Karawi, M. (2020). Using language games at English lessons in Iraq. *Astraea*, 1 (1), 8–35. doi: 10.34142/astreaa.2020.1.1.01

