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TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS USING GAMES IN SERBIAN EFL CLASSROOMS

Abstract: The aim of this research was to determine the teachers' and students' willingness for using educational games in an English language classroom in Nis and Leskovac. The study was performed on 178 pupils who learn English as a foreign language (EFL) from the 5th to the 8th grade and 19 primary school teachers. In order to determine their attitudes and opinion, two techniques were used: Likert scale and questioning technique. The research has proved that both the teachers and students have positive attitude towards using games in an English language classroom, but that they are used rarely in the classroom. The results suggest that games should be introduced in to the classroom since both the teachers and students are willing to participate in them.

Key words: educational games, EFL classroom, attitudes, teachers, students

0. INTRODUCTION

Among renown educators who accepted game in the classroom and had a positive attitude towards using games were: John Amos Comenius, Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel, Claparede and Decroli.

John Amos Comenius, a Czech teacher, educator, and writer, was a religious refugee, and one of the earliest champions of universal education, a concept eventually set forth in his book *Didactica Magna*. The previously mentioned author knew perfectly well what was very important for learning regardless the subject: people must really enjoy learning and only then can they achieve the most favourable results (Laurie 2009). His ideas can be applied in various ways to modern time teaching, as well. Students play, perform entertaining activities perhaps without even knowing that they are engaged in the process of learning. On the other hand, Froebel lived in the XVIII century and laid the foundation for modern education based on the recognition that children have unique needs and capabilities. He sought to encourage the creation of educational environment which involved practical work and direct use of materials, i.e. understanding unfolds, through engaging with the world (Froebel 1912). Hence the significance of playing: it is a creative activity and, by engaging in it, children become aware of their place

in the world. A XIX century teacher and psychologist, Decroly, and his team built dozens of games out of word or cardboard (Dubreucq 1993). The sets of games were carefully graded and related to the development of sensory perceptions, attention and motor attitude (visual, auditory etc.) and to introducing reading, grammar and understanding language. These first psychological – educational games were marked and their success is well known. Interest is therefore the vary foundation of the desire to learn, it gives the child power to accept the difficulty that will result in satisfaction. Finally, Claparède, a Swiss neurologist and child psychologist, was the first to give theory about child's play (Hameline 1993). He says that a child plays because it is in the child's interest to play and because one is therefore interested in playing as well as in learning. The previously mentioned author believes that school should be active – a laboratory, not an auditorium. It must not make a child hate work.

“Childhood has a biological role to play. [...] One must therefore study the natural manifestations of the child and make educational activity fit in with them. Methods and curricula gravitating around the child, and not the child turning as best it can around a programme decreed without reference to him; that is the Copernican revolution psychology urges on the educator.” (Claparède 1919: 3–5)

Since the method of teaching English through games is relatively novel, several researches were done on the subject. One of them is the research conducted by IPSOS MORY and FUTURE LAB agency (Sandford et al. 2007) to determine students' and teachers' attitudes towards using educational computer games during classes. The research was carried out during 2005/2006 school year in England and Wales, and the participants were 1000 primary and secondary teachers, and 2334 primary and secondary students. During the period between the 4th and the 25th November 2005 the first part of the research was conducted, where the participants were primary and secondary teachers. The questionnaire was used as the instrument. The main results obtained are shown below:

1. Considering the usage of games, 31% of teachers said that they had used them and 69% said they had not.
2. In addition, 59% of teachers would consider using them in the classroom for educational purposes, while 37% of teachers would not, and only 3% were not sure about it.

During the period between the 24th February and the 18th of May 2006 the second part of the research was carried out, where the participants were primary and secondary students. The questionnaire was again used as an instrument. The main results are shown below:

1. Considering the usage of games 22% of students answered that they had used games during classes, while 66% had not, 11% were uncertain, and only 1% stated nothing.
2. In addition 62% of students would consider using the games, while 22% would not, 15% were not sure and 1% did not state anything.

It is assumed that the similar situation to the one stated above, can be found in our primary schools. Because of the previously stated facts we have decided to carry out a research to determine the teachers' and students' attitudes towards using games in a foreign language classroom, as well as to determine how often our primary teachers use games in teaching the English language. The research was carried out in Nis and Leskovac, cities in the southern part of Serbia.

1. THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING GAMES IN EFL TEACHING – THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is a diversity of game types used in EFL teaching, e.g. guessing, searching, matching, sorting, ordering games etc. Somewhat more modern foreign language teaching theorists and applied linguists maintain that games should not merely be regarded as ice-breakers or diversion devices, since their fundamental aim is to use language through obeying certain rules of the game (Byrne 1995).

Some of the advantages of using games in EFL teaching are the following:

- 1) Games can increase interest of students in otherwise non-interesting activities, e.g. learning grammar (Wright et al., 2005).
- 2) Games provide context for meaningful communication, and thus enable comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985).
- 3) Furthermore, games lower the affective filter, by decreasing anxiety, reducing stress level and creating positive learning atmosphere (Krashen, 1985).
- 4) Through playing games, learners may practice all four basic skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Lee, 1995).
- 5) Developing team spirit and cooperative abilities, and likewise promoting a healthy competitive learning environment, may also arise from successful game playing in EFL classroom (Jacobs & Kline Liu, 1996).
- 6) Games are predominantly student, rather than teacher-based and can connect to a variety of intelligences (Gardner, 1999).

However, some of the disadvantages may be:

- 1) discipline problems, learners may get excessively noisy
- 2) straying away from the basic purpose of the game-play activity, perhaps, due to inadequate rules instruction, resulting in playing too much and the lack of learning
- 3) if games are already familiar or boring, students might not get equally involved
- 4) some learners, especially teenagers, may find games unnecessary and childish.

When choosing a game, an EFL teacher should ponder upon numerous issues. One of the most important ones may be providing clear explanations, or

even demonstrations of the rules of the game employed. Otherwise, students may completely misinterpret the purpose of the game which will result in insufficient benefits they might have gained from it initially. Teachers should also take different learning styles and preferences into consideration, students' age, the nature of the game itself and its difficulty level, the appropriate time and place as well as the goals of the curriculum.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. THE RESEARCH SUBJECT

In order to find out the teachers' and students' attitudes, we have decided to carry out an empirical research, so the subject of our research is to determine the attitudes of students from the 5th to the 8th grade as well as to determine teachers' attitudes towards using games in ELT in Nis and Leskovac.

2.2. AIM

According to the research problem and research subject we can set the aim of this research. The aim of this research is to determine the teachers' and students' willingness for using games in teaching English language.

2.3. TASKS

According to the subject and the aim, the following tasks have been set:

1. To show how often language games are used in teaching English language from the 5th to the 8th grade.
2. To present different students' opinion about using games in English language learning considering students' age.
3. To present the teachers' attitudes towards using games in English language teaching considering teachers' working experience.
4. To discover differences in the attitude towards using games in learning English among male and female students.

2.4. HYPOTHESES

According to the subject of the research and the previously stated tasks, the hypotheses have been set:

1. Games are used rarely in English language teaching from the 5th to the 8th grade.
2. Students of lower grades have more positive opinion towards using games than the students of upper grades.

3. Teachers with 10 years of working experience have more positive attitude towards using games in ELT than other teachers.
4. There is no difference in the attitude between male and female students towards using games in English language learning.

2.5. PARTICIPANTS

The research was carried out on a group of primary teachers of English language as well as on the group of primary pupils from the 5th to the 8th grade from schools in Nis and Leskovac during 2007/2008 school year. The population consisted of 178 pupils and 19 teachers. In this research was used the availability sampling method. So the above stated schools were visited and both the teachers and the pupils who were available and who wanted to participate in the research were found.

2.6. MEASURE

In this research were used both scaling and questioning technique, which means that as instruments were used Likert scale and questioner. In our research we have used Likert scale, one for teachers and another for students. Each of them consists of twelve statements. In order to find out teachers' and students' opinion and willingness towards using games we have also used two questionnaires, one for teachers and another for students.

2.7. PROCEDURE

The above stated schools were visited and the participants were given both the questioner and scale to fill in. The participants were presented with number of statements about the value of language games in the scale, some statements were positively phrased and some negatively, which have been found to discriminate most clearly between extreme views on the subject of the research. The responses were scored using five bipolar categories (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree), coded for positive statements 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and for negative 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The questioner consisted of fourteen questions, and through it were examined both students' and teachers' opinion towards using games. Then the data and the gathered information were processed and interpreted, resulting in the final version of the present paper.

2.8. STATISTICAL DATA PROCESSING

All data gathered by the research were processed in the following way:

- All gathered data were processed according to coding lists.
- Then all processed data were prepared for analysis by forming database.

- Then the results were submitted to descriptive analysis in order to calculate the basic statistic parameters (absolute and relative frequency);
- A chi square statistic (χ^2) was used to investigate whether distributions of categorical variables differ from one another. The Chi Square statistic compares the counts of categorical responses between two independent groups. Chi square tests can only be used on actual numbers. We have applied the formula

$$\chi^2 = \sum \left[\frac{(f_o - f_t)^2}{f_t} \right]$$

Where: χ^2 - chi square, Σ – sum, f_o – empirical/observed frequency, f_t – theoretical/expected frequency,

- For contingency coefficient we have applied the formula:

$$C = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{N + \chi^2}}$$

Where: C – contingency, χ^2 - chi square, N – total number of examinees.

- Degrees of freedom df for which we have applied the formula:

$$df = (r-1) \cdot (c - 1)$$

Which means (number of columns minus one) x (number of rows minus one).
Level of significance $p = (0.01)$ or (0.05) .

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 THE USAGE OF LANGUAGE GAMES IN ELT

The first task of our research was to determine how often games are used in the ELT from the 5th to the 8th grade. After processing the gathered data, we received the following results:

Table 1. Usage of language games in ELT

Usage of language games	Number of participants	f%
Always	6	31.58
Rarely	13	68.42
Never	-	-
Σ	19	100

From the previous table, we can conclude that language games are used from time to time, which means rarely, since 13 or 68.42% of teachers answered that they use language games rarely, while only 6 of them or 31.58, answered that they use

them constantly. Although the language game in our country was introduced during 70's, the teachers do not give it still the central part in the foreign language teaching program.

3.2. TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TOWARDS USING GAME

Before we present results for each research task, we have to present teachers' and students' willingness towards using games in a foreign language classroom, since all of the following results are based on this fact. Results that we got are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Teachers' willingness towards using game

Willingness	<i>f</i>	%
willing	15	78.94
unwilling	-	-
undecided	3	21.06
Σ	18	100.00

If we look closely at the table 2, we can conclude that teachers are either willing or undecided towards using this method. This is an important fact, since our assumption was that they are mainly unwilling, which proved not to be true, however we can still say that although a large number of teachers are willing to use (15 or 78.94%), there is still a quit significant number of teachers who are still undecided or better say, skeptical about this method (3 or 21.06%). Teachers who are willing to use this method, have either used it already or simply are those who want to introduce a new method in teaching.

The results that we got concerning students' willingness towards using games in a foreign language classroom are presented in the following table:

Table 3. Students' willingness towards using games

Willingness	<i>f</i>	%
willing	114	64.04
unwilling	20	11.24
undecided	44	24.72
Σ	178	100.00

If we again closely look at the table above, we can say that the situation is pretty the same as with teachers, since 114 or 64.04% of students are willing to use game in foreign language classroom and 44 or 24.72% of students are undecided about this. The only difference is that there are also the students who are unwilling to use game in the classroom. This can be explained by the fact that the students who have been exposed to games before are willing to learn through them, while the students who are undecided probably are not sure that the games should be used in education. Finally the students who are unwilling to use the games are interested in other activities, or they think that games can be only distraction in a learning process, or simply they prefer learning to playing.

3.3. STUDENTS' OPINION ABOUT USING GAMES CONSIDERING THEIR AGE

The second task of our research was to determine students' opinion towards using games considering their age. This was determined by connecting two variables and in the Contingency table, we connected O2 and O7 from database for the teachers' questionnaire. After having processed the gathered data, we obtained the following results. We now have chi square statistics ($\chi^2= 9.655$), and predetermined level of significance (0.01), and degrees of freedom ($df =6$). Entering the Chi square distribution table with degree of freedom and reading along the row, we find that our value of χ^2 (9.655) lies between 12.592 and 16.812. Since our probability level (9.655) is lower than significant levels (12.592 and 16.812), we can conclude that there are no statistically significant differences in the students' opinions towards using games considering their age. On the other hand, from the previously given table we can conclude that the students of lower grades have more positive attitude towards using games than the students of upper grades.

Table 4. Students' opinion towards using games considering their age

Grade	Willingness for using games in ELT			Σ
	Willing	Unwilling	Undecided	
V	29 72.5	4 10.00	7 17.5	40 100,00
VI	40 88.89	1 2.22	4 8.89	45 100,00
VII	35 81.39	1 2.33	7 16.28	43 100,00
VIII	33 66.00	6 12.00	11 22.00	50 100,00
Σ	137 76.97	12 6.74	29 16.29	178 100,00

$\chi^2= 9.655$ $C=0.586$ $df=6$ $p=0.01$

This can be explained by the fact that the younger students still want to play while the elder students are mainly undecided, since they are expected to be more serious and are still unable to see the educational value of language games.

3.4. TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS USING GAMES ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKING EXPERIENCE

The third task of our research was to determine teachers' attitude towards using games in ELT according to their working experience. First we had processed the Likert scale, and from the previous table (Table 5), we divided, the participants in three categories: those who had very positive attitude, those who have positive and those who have negative attitude towards using language games. After having processed the scale, we made a Contingency table, in which we connected two variables: O3 from database for teachers' questionnaire and above mentioned categories from the Likert scale. The results that we got are shown in the following table. We now have chi square statistics ($\chi^2= 4.032$), and predetermined level of significance (0.01), and degrees of freedom ($df=4$). Entering the Chi square distribution table with degree of freedom and reading along the row, we find our value of χ^2 (4.032) lies between 9.488 and 13.277. Since our probability level (4.032) is lower than significant levels (9.488 and 13.277), we can conclude that there is no statistically significant difference in the teachers' attitudes towards using games in ELT considering their working experience. From the previous table, we can conclude that the first group as well as the third group of teachers, has the similar attitudes towards using games in ELT. In the first group, there were the teachers with 1-10 years of working experience and in the third, with 21-30 years of working experience. The attitudes of the teachers from the first group can be explained by the fact that those teachers were exposed to the modern education, as well as to the constant teachers' training. Although the second group as exposed to the traditional used education, it was still able to see the educational value which language games have in the ELT.

Table 5. Teachers' attitude towards using games according to their working experience

Working experience	Attitudes			Σ
	Very positive	Positive	Negative	
1–10	2 28.57	3 42.86	2 28.57	7 100.00
11–20	1 16.67	2 33.33	3 50.00	6 100.00
21–30	4 66.66	1 16.67	1 16.67	6 100.00
Σ	7 36.84	6 31.58	6 31.58	19 100.00

$\chi^2=$

3.5. STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS USING LANGUAGE GAMES CONSIDERING THEIR SEXES

The fourth task of our research was to determine whether there was any difference in the attitude towards using games in learning English among male and female students. First, we had processed the Likert scale and divided the participants in to three categories: those with very positive attitude, with positive and with negative attitude towards using language games. After having processed the scale, we made a contingency table, in which we connected two variables: O1 from database for students' questionnaire and above mentioned categories from Likert scale. The results that we got are shown in the following table:

Table 6. Students' attitude towards using language games considering their sexes

Gender	Attitudes			Σ
	Very positive	Positive	Negative	
Male	35 33.33	31 29.52	39 37.15	105 100.00
Female	29 39.72	25 34.25	19 26.03	73 100.00
Σ	64 5.96	56 31.46	58 32.58	178 100.00

$\chi^2= 2.42$ $C=0.178$ $df=2$ $p=0.01$

We have obtained now chi square statistics ($\chi^2= 2.42$), and predetermined level of significance (0.01), and degrees of freedom ($df =2$). Entering the Chi square distribution table with degree of freedom and reading along the row, we find our value of χ^2 (2.42) lies between 5.991 and 9.210. Since our probability level (2.42) is lower than significant levels (5.991 and 9.210), we can conclude that there is no statistically significant differences in the students' attitudes towards using games in ELT considering their sexes.

From the previously given table, we can conclude that there is no differences in the attitudes among male and female students. This can be explained by the fact that every child has a biological need to play.

4. CONCLUSION

This research was based on the assumption that some of the English language teachers have negative attitudes towards using games as a teaching method. This research has the following characteristics:

- It was carried out according to the research problem and tasks;
- Since we could not find enough researches on this problem, this research has proved that the researches of this kind can be carried out.

The research has proved:

- The language games are rarely used in the foreign language classroom from the 5th to the 8th grade;
- The students of lower grades have more positive attitude than the students of upper grades towards using language games in the classroom;
- The teachers with 10 year working experience and the teachers of 21-30 year working experience have more positive attitude towards using games in ELT than other teachers;
- There is no difference in the attitudes between male and female students towards using games in learning English language;

This research has been based on the assumption that although game means fun, it also has its educational value. And for this reason it should be introduced in the language classes. Through game students are able to realize their own as well as their classmates progress in learning language.

Taking the afore mentioned issues into consideration, two questions remain unanswered and may represent the incentive for further research: if the language game will be given the it deserves in a teaching program and whether the teachers, who are used to teaching according to traditional, occasionally even outdated ways, will accept the game as one of the teaching methods.

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СТАВОВИ СРПСКИХ НАСТАВНИКА И УЧЕНИКА О УПОТРЕБИ ИГАРА ПРИ УЧЕЊУ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА

Резиме: Циљ истраживања био је утврдити ставове српских ученика и наставника према коришћењу игара при учењу страног језика, прецизније енглеског, и то у школама у Нишу и Лесковцу. У истраживању је учествовало 178 ученика који уче енглески језик као страни од петог до осмог разреда основне школе и 19 наставника основних школа. Како би се утврдили њихови ставови, употребљене су две технике: Ликертова скала и упитник. Истраживање је показало да и наставници и ученици имају позитиван став према употреби игара при учењу енглеског језика, али да се игре ретко користе у учионици. Из добијених резултата изводи се закључак да игре треба чешће користити у настави страног језика јер су и наставници и ученици вољни да у њима учествују.

Кључне речи: игре у настави, настава енглеског језика, ставови, наставници, ученици