

Some Games Used to Teach Vocabulary to Young Learners

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Abstract: Many English classes in Indonesia are now filled with many young learners. For example, a class may consist of 25 – 30 students. As a result, this may not be effective. The students could feel bored, stuck, and noisy, furthermore, if the class is filled by many young learners the atmosphere cannot be supportive anymore. To overcome the problem, the English teacher can vary his/her teaching techniques, one of which is playing games. They can undoubtedly, entertain the students Wierus and Wierus (1994:218) said that in easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better. This paper discusses the benefit of using games, the appropriacy of using games, and some current games to teach vocabulary.

Key words: vocabulary games, young learners

THE BENEFIT OF USING GAMES

Games not only function as time filling activities but also bring some educational values. Lee (1979: 2) states that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct form. Besides that, games should be treated as a central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. Also, Steinberg (1988: ix) emphasized that games are a viable method to achieve many educational objectives such as reinforcement, review, reward, relax, inhibition reduction, attentiveness, retention, and motivation. This implies that any English

teacher should know and master the skill of using language games in his/her class. This may be given at the English Teacher Training.

Next, Richard-Amato (1988 : 14) believe that games could be fun. They can lower anxiety. They can add diversion to the regular classroom activities, break the ice, and introduce new ideas. Hansen (1994 : 118) states that they can innovate, and entertain. They can also give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings. They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language. Further, Zdybiewska (1994 : 6) supports that games can become a good way of practising language, because they provide a model of what learners will use the language for in real life in the future.

In conclusion, games are able to help students use and practise the language, in a relaxed way. However, eventhough games have many advantages, they cannot be used by any kind of students.

THE APPROPRIACY OF USING GAMES:

Siek – Piskozub (1994 : 37) stated that not all games are appropriate for all students irrespective of their age. Different age groups require various topics, materials, and modes of games. And they also emphasized that structural games that practice or reinforce a certain grammatical aspect of language have to relate to students' abilities and prior knowledge. Games become difficult when the task or the topic is unsuitable or outside the student's experience. Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1990:2) stated that early teenagers tend to be more self consciousness and a teacher must consider their reticence when selecting games for them. Games that can be played in pairs or groups may be particularly useful for them.

Besides, the teacher has to be able to choose the length and the time allocated of the games. Also, this allocation has to consider the students' level , the number of people in a group, and the knowledge of the rules of games.

GAMES TO TEACH VOCABULARY

Based on some requirements to choose appropriate games above, below are some games which may be used to teach vocabulary to young learners; they are: (1) Circle Game, (2) Draw-a-Word-Game, (3). Vo-

cabulary Exchange Game, (4) Verb Group Game, (5) Prefixes: a Word Game, (6) Word Formation Game, (7) Vocabulary Dice Game and, (8) Irregular Verbs Match.

1. **Circle Game:** This is called circle game because it can be played in circles of 3 up to 7 players. This game proposed by Morgan and Reinvoluci (1986 : 93). They are suitable for beginner, elementary, and intermediate level and take between 10 – 15 minutes. The *procedures* of circle game called Letter by Letter are as follows: Player A says a letter and then, Player B thinks of a word beginning with A's letter and says its second letter. C thinks of a word beginning with the two letters already given and says its third letter, and so on round the circle. The person who, in saying a letter, completes a word, loses and must drop out (or lose a life). If a player, on his/her turn, thinks that the combination offered so far cannot lead to a word, she/he may challenge the previous player to say the word, then the player loses a life, otherwise the challenger is penalized. The game can continue until only one player is left.
2. **Draw - a - word-Game:** This game which is used after the students should have already been taught the meaning of the words and their pronunciation is suggested by Mannon T.M. It is also for students any of level of English and may take 30 minutes. The teacher should prepare large sheet of paper, pencils, and coloring pens. *Procedures:* Divide the students into Teams X and Y: give each team nine review words. Then, have the members of each team work together (each team on a separate side of the room) to draw a picture representing six of the words. All members are to offer ideas, but the group must decide which is the best idea and who is the best person to draw it. Each picture is drawn on a large piece of paper so that, when shown from the front of the room, all students can see it. The word should be written in the top right-hand corner on the back for the teacher (small letters so only the teacher sees it). After that, circulate among the students. If a drawing is too sloppy or too abstract, make the students redo it. Next, one representative from each team comes up with the drawings (The same representatives remain at the front of the class for an entire game). The representative from Team X holds up the first drawing. Inhibit talking (e.g., telling the answers) with a

fine of three points. Keep a record of points on the blackboard. Then, as the members of Team Y who want to guess the words hold up their hands; call on one of them. If the person guesses correctly, give Team Y 5 points. Then have the representative from Team Y hold up a picture for Team X to guess and continue to play. If the answer is incorrect, call on someone else from Team Y. If that person guesses correctly, Team Y gets 3 points. If that person guesses incorrectly, call on a third person from Team Y. A correct response earns 1 point; an incorrect response results in a loss of 3 points (- 3). Finally, have the representative from Team Y hold up the most points at the end wins.

3. **Vocabulary Exchange Game:** This game is suggested by Elizabeth Lange. It is for any level of English ability and takes 40 minutes. The teacher just prepares strips of paper approximately 3.5 cm x 18 cm. It is a highly interactive activity because the learners write the hints, they must use their known English to explain unknown English words to someone else. *Procedures:* Have the students choose one different word from a text all the students have read, by allotting different pages or sections for each students to choose from. Make sure the students do not tell anyone what word they choose. Then, have them write a sentence or more on their strip of paper containing and explaining the word they choose. They should leave the chosen word blank but can supply hints. You need to supply enough example so that the students understand exactly what to do when they write their sentences. The following is an example to illustrate how to write context clues that leave the key word blank.

Apples, oranges, grapes, and pears are examples of

Additional hints might be "that is a noun" and "consists of five letters") You may also need to check each student's context clues and make sure the students are equipped with expressions such as *once more please, please give me more hints, how many letter are there? , You are getting close, etc.* When ready to begin, have the whole class stand up, each person finding a partner to explain their context clues to and give other hints for their particular word. They must use eye contact while explaining and keep giving hints until their partner guesses the word. Then, have them exchange roles. When each pair

has guessed each other's words, they have to exchange strip of paper and find a new partner. The process continues until each student has exchanged strip of paper as many times as there are students in the class. Finally, test the students on the vocabulary items.

4. **Verb Group Game:** This game is contributed by Jo Hilder. The use of this game is to practice verbs and provide practice in the grammatical accuracy of verbs groups. It allows students to try using new words and to discuss whether the use is right or wrong. Some very lively and hot discussions can result. Although the activity has a grammar focus, it contributes to vocabulary learning by encouraging creative use of met verbs. The teacher just prepares a set of 40 verb cards for each group of four or five and of 40 auxiliary verb cards for the the whole class. It can take one hour class time and 30 minutes for preparation. The level is for Intermediate and Advanced. *Procedures:* Prepare vocabulary cards in advance. You need (for each group of four or five students) 40 auxiliary verb cards: 10 modal verbs, 10 forms of have (have, had, has) and 20 forms of be (is , was, are, were) and 40 verb cards using words currently being studied by the students: 10 stem forms, 10 *-ing* forms (present participles) and 10 *-ed* forms (past participle). It is best if the auxiliary verb cards are all on a different color card from the verb card to avoid confusion. Next, give groups one set of auxiliary verb cards and one set of verb cards. The auxiliary verb cards are placed face down in the middle of the table. All the verb cards are dealt to the players *-an* equal number to each player. After that, the first player takes a card from the top of the auxiliary verb pile and places it face up on the table. The player then looks at the cards in her/his hand to see if they include a verb form that can go with the auxiliary verb just turned over. If she does, she places the verb card next to the auxiliary verb card so that everyone can see it. The player must then say a sentence using the verb group she has created. If the group agrees the sentence is correct in grammar and meaning, the player keeps the pair of cards. If the sentence is considered incorrect, the player must take back her verb card, and return the auxiliary verb card to the bottom of the pile. In either case, the next player then has a turn. Finally, be available to settle disputes and answer questions. The winner is the player with most pairs at the

end of the game.

5. **Prefixes: A Word Game:** The game is created by Nikhat Schamee. The level is for Beginners. The preparation time is one hour and class time is 10 minutes. The teacher just prepares cardboard, scissors, felt-tip pens. This game is used to help in follow up work in guessing meaning of words from contexts, and in using the meanings of prefixes to confirm a guess. It also helps the beginners review parts of speech. *Procedures:* Cut up cardboard into equal sizes about 5 centimeters x 3 centimeters. The number of pieces depends on the size of the class, but there should be 16 pieces for every group of four. Next, for each group, print on the cards: four words beginning with prefixes you want learners to know, the meaning of the words, the parts of speech of the words, the meaning of the prefixes. After that, tell each member of the group to take four cards, one from each of the categories above. The aim for the group is to make four sets of four cards. Finally, have each learner contribute a card from each of the categories above in order to complete each set. Learners do not look at each other's cards but describe them to each other.
6. **Word Formation Game:** This game is contributed by Michele Kilgore. It is for Intermediate and Advanced level. The class time is 45 - 60 minutes for 15 - 20 students. The aims are to study four processes of word formation in English and to practice creating words. It also requires students to work in teams which are told they cannot use the real word as game entries. To comply with this rule, team members are forced to exchange information about existing vocabulary in the process of producing new words. *Procedures:* Divide the class into teams. The game works most effectively if teams have equally mixed English proficiency levels. Then, explain the following word formation processes to the class: an acronym is the result of combining the first sounds or letters of principle words in a phrase. *Radar* is acronym for "radio detecting and ranging," while *scuba* represents "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus". Blending is a process that combines parts of existing words to produce new words. *Clash* is derived from "clap" and "crash"; *because* came from "by" and "cause". Compounding combines entire words to produce new vocabulary items, such as *flashlight*, *doorknob*, and *headache*. Clipping produces

short words, such as *phone* from "telephone" and *gas* from "gasoline". Next, have each team gather and make as many words as possible using the processes. After approximately 20 minutes of deliberation, one member of each team writes the team's entries on the blackboard. Finally, ask the class as a whole to decide if each entry follows a rule of word formation. Teams must supply definitions. The teacher or any class member may note whether the entry is an existing word. A team wins by making up the largest number of new words. Students usually need to be reminded that the point of the game is to create words, not to list familiar vocabulary. A team must have entries in all categories and be able to give definition for each entry.

7. **Vocabulary Dice Game:** This game is contributed by Nat Caulk. It is for Beginning and Low Intermediate levels. The aims are (1) to practice vocabulary, such as: numbers, days of the week, months, colors, names of classmate, and furniture, (2) to be creative, and (3) to play cooperatively and noncompetitively. *Procedures:* Prepare several copies of a game board, including a poster-sized one for demonstration. Display the large game board at the front of the class. Explain that the object of the game is to color the game board and that players proceed by rolling dice, counting the appropriate number of spaces, and coloring each space they land on. Then, demonstrate one player's turn as follows: choose a space to start on and color it in. Roll the dice and count off the correct number of spaces by saying numbers, days of the week, months, or other vocabulary, one word per space. Color the space you land on. After that, demonstrate two or three more turns, using a different color each time to indicate that you are a different player. Next, divide the class into groups of three or five students. Give each group a game board and crayons. Have each group member choose a different color, decide which space to start at, and color in the space. Then, have the students take turns rolling the dice. The one with the highest number gets to go first, starting from the space she/he colored it. On each turn, the students start from the last space they colored in.
8. **Irregular Verb Match:** This game is suggested by Campbell and Kryszewska for Elementary to Lower Intermediate levels. It takes 10

minutes. *Procedures:* Learners stand up and form pairs. Student A gives the infinitive form of a verb and student B has to supply the simple past form. If they agree that the answer is right, B has the chance to test A in the same way. They continue, alternating turns, until one person either does not know the answer or, according to the questioner, makes a mistake. Any disputes should be referred to you as umpire. Next, the student who does not know, or who has made a mistake, sits down and the remaining student looks for another partner. Finally, the game continues until only one person remains standing.

CONCLUSION

Games can be used to teach some aspects of English and students can form themselves into groups to play the games. This is important to be done by the teacher in order that he/she can manage the shy students to be active, enthusiastic, and motivated. The games also inform the teacher of the time and preparation used to play the game in the class so that he/she can select which games are very suitable to the class situation at the time.

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