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B.A.Zhetpisbayeva<sup>1</sup>, T.Y.Shelestova<sup>1</sup>, Ja.Taborek<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Ye.A.Buketov Karaganda State University;*

<sup>2</sup>*Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland*

*(E-mail: shelestova2009@mail.ru)*

### **Games in teaching English to primary school children**

Early foreign language teaching is a widely discussed phenomenon. Its importance increases in the Kazakhstan context and with the ideas of multiculturalism and multilingualism. Despite many positive sides to standardizing early English language teaching in Kazakhstan many problems still remain to be tackled. The necessity of using communicative games in teaching English to primary school children is substantiated in the article. Complex of games for different stages of learning are described. Factors affecting communicative competence development are analyzed.

*Key words:* Early foreign language teaching, young learners, primary education, complex of games, communicative competence development.

The teaching of English is a growing focus of many nation states as English is considered to be a key competence in the information society. Consequently, many nation states focus on teaching English to children at the early stages of schooling, a strategy that may create both competent citizens and competitive nation states. This calls for new learning designs and new learning materials for primary school levels.

Early language learning will produce successful language learners, where an early language start is often seen as an advantage.

There are indications that young learners are more open to and engaged in learning a new language — and that early beginnings may give them a head start on learning — issues such as pedagogy, teacher education and feedback, exposure, distribution of lessons and progression are also significant. This supports the idea that the design of learning material for young learners that address several of these contextual issues is of great significance to the quality of learning. Unlike most other school subjects foreign language learning has a long history of integrating different games into learning, using paper, cards and classroom games. Generally, games in language learning are associated with intrinsic motivation, meaningful exposure to the target language, as well as perceived associations between children's language play and second/foreign language learning.

Games are often difficult to integrate into formal learning. However, a recent study (Egenfeldt-Nielsen 2011) concludes that «foreign language teachers believe that there is a larger potential for pupils to learn more from games in their subject compared to teachers of other subjects».

Almost everybody loves playing whether they are young or old. From early childhood playing is an enormous part of most children's lives and it plays a big part of their development as well. Children start playing as early as infancy but as they develop throughout their childhood they keep playing, and as they grow up and mature the nature of their play changes. When children enter middle childhood (6–12) their play starts to change into games which are different from play in the sense that they are more organized and planned, and they usually include a variation of rules and a specific objective [1].

When playing most games participants are almost forced into communicating with each other in order for the game to work. The need for communication during games, and the informal setting games provide encourages students to be unafraid to talk, which practices their fluency, a valuable communication skill. The national curriculum for foreign languages in Kazakhstan emphasizes the importance of learning languages and especially the importance of communication. Because of this fact it is vitally important for teachers to create a positive learning environment, and to try to spark interest amongst their students both in the foreign language and culture because that is important to a successful language learning process. Games help achieve these goals as they help satisfy the requirement of the national curriculum that language learning should be enjoyable for students.

Teaching today has changed a lot over the past years. Once it was all about learners being passive and listening in the classroom, but today learners are usually much more active in the classroom, and what better way to be active than by playing games [2]. The national curriculum in foreign languages in Kazakhstan talks about the importance of keeping teaching methods diverse in order to light and sustain interest amongst students.

Teachers can help sustain diversity in a variety of ways, for example by using activities that require students to be creative in thinking and by emphasizing individual learning and cooperative learning equally. A more specific way that teachers can use in order to keep diversity within the classroom is to not be afraid of using games as a teaching method along with other methods. According to the national curriculum games can be a good teaching method and games, such as role playing games, imitation games, theatrical expression and problem solving activities are especially fitting for all stages of language learning.

There are a number of reasons that games deserve a place in the language classroom. First of all, they are fun, which is extremely important, because they can help activate students who may have been inactive before, due to lack of interest. Keeping students active is vital because teachers will never be able to actually teach students anything unless they can get them to participate in their own learning process.

Second, games also play a big part in helping participants build relationships, and to feel equal. Playing games in the classroom can also help create a friendly and positive atmosphere where seat arrangement can differ from game to game, and thus cause diversity from the norm which can be extremely helpful in keeping an exciting learning environment.

Third, the reason most people want to learn a language is to be able to use it in real situations, for example when travelling. Games can be a very good way to practice this skill because they can easily be used to reenact various situations from real life and provide students with practice in their fluency. Also, by using games in the classroom the teacher is giving his students a bigger role, and he himself is stepping out of the frontline which is a positive thing because it allows students to take on more responsibility. Also that allows students to do more on their own, and that can very well result in an increase in their confidence level [3].

Fourth, language students need to be exposed to the language in a variety of situations, which is a need games can fulfill. Language students also need to be ready to take on the experience, keeping their minds open and being willing participants. Again, games make this possible.

Fifth, language students need to be emotionally involved, meaning they need to feel something while they are exposed to the language. Strong emotions, such as happiness, excitement, amusement and suspense allow students to feel positively about their learning situation and are therefore likely to have a positive effect on language learning.

Sixth, games are good for shy students and students with low confidence, and that applies specifically when playing takes place in smaller groups because then they get a chance to speak in front of fewer audience instead of having to express themselves in front of the whole class. Also it is sometimes easier to open up and forget the shyness when playing a game because the atmosphere is not as serious and more emphasis is put on fluency rather than grammatical correctness [3].

Seventh, games can be a good strategy when teaching various subjects because they are very likely to spark interest amongst students. They can be used with students of all ages, and when they are used with other teaching methods they create diversity which is ideal for school work. A study that was undertaken in different primary schools in Karaganda shows clearly the need for diversity in schools. Many participants in that study complained about the lack of diversity, and that they wanted more of it in order for their learning to become more fun and progressive in their school.

Finally, using games in the classroom is important because many children do not get enough opportunity to play during their free time, which can be traced to the rapid changes in our society. Cities are getting bigger and traffic is getting heavier which means that more and more parents are hesitant to let their children

play outside. Also passive activities such as watching television, or the computer screen are seen as being more exciting than actually physically playing, so today the sight of children playing various games in groups outside is becoming much more rare than it was 10 or 15 years ago. This is not a good development, and it can have several bad consequences for our society. One possible consequence is that the lack of movement can cause health problems because even though not all games are physical some certainly are [4].

Another point teachers need to keep in mind is to choose wisely when it comes to selecting a game to use in the classroom because; although one game might be perfect for one teacher or a particular group of students it can be terrible for another teacher or group of students. First of all, the teacher has to look at the group that will be participating in the game and he or she then has to set out a goal for the group which the game should aim towards [5]. Selecting an appropriate game for a specific group of students who are working towards a specific goal can be tricky because, for example, they need to make sure that the game is relevant to the subject, that it fits their students' age and, teachers must remember not to select a game that is too complicated because that might result in a loss of interest amongst the students, or even defeat.

Also teachers must make sure they explain the rules of the game in detail and that all instructions are clear before starting the game. During the game it is important for the teachers to observe and be ready to help, but without unnecessarily interrupting the flow of the game because that might affect the fluency, which could result in discouraging students from participating. After the game, it is a good idea to have some sort of a follow up activity planned because it gives the student's time to reflect upon the game and how it turned out. It is important for teachers to know that augmenting a game is allowed and can certainly be necessary in some cases. More difficult games can be made easier so they become a challenge instead of too hard for less skilled or younger students and vice versa.

Although games can usually be modified to suit students of various ages, there are certain characteristics in games that appeal to children within specific age groups. For children age 6–8 repetition is very common in games, rules are often few, and the games usually do not take a very long time. When it comes to children age 9–11 they have patience for longer games, which often include much more suspense. Also when children reach this age they start to be able to augment the games themselves, for example to bend the rules to make the game more suited for their group. For children older than 12 games are often much more planned and they often emphasize teams and teamwork.

Writing is a skill that, even in the native language, is learnt and not acquired. That fact could explain in part why writing is often considered to be difficult, or even boring in the target language. Another explanation could be that it is often assigned as homework, and many students don't like homework. One possible reason why writing can be viewed as being difficult is because the writer does not get an immediate feedback similar to what happens during conversations, and as a result the writer could feel more insecure about his work. Some teachers also unwisely use writing as punishment: «Ok, just for that Sasha, I want to see an essay on my desk tomorrow!» Writing also demands a completely different language than normally used in conversations. For students in school this must not become their experience of writing because that can lead to their loathing of writing. Games can be a good way to prevent this because not only are games fun but they can provide writers with a reason to write and it is obvious that writing will become easier when there is a clear reason instead of just having to write because the teacher said so. Another thing that games can provide for writers is an audience. In many games other students will play the reader's part and therefore provide the writer with the necessary feedback that writing often lacks [6]. A variety of interactive writing games can be found on the internet and teachers can, without much effort, create a game that practices writing. For example, when teaching students how to write a formal letter a game where participants would have to rearrange sentences to position them correctly, so they make a formal letter, could be a good game.

Most people remember training their listening skill mainly by doing listening activities when they were in school. Listening activities might very well be an effective way of training that particular skill but teachers need to remember to keep the activities versatile or their students might get bored. By combining listening with games, teachers might prevent their students from getting bored, and by keeping them interested they are increasing the chances of the students achieving their goals. An example of a good listening game is the famous game «Simon says» where one participant plays the role of Simon and gives the others directions, for example by saying: «Simon says jump», or «Simon says stop jumping» and then everybody would have to do that. If Simon only says «everybody jump» and does not attach the phrase «Simon says» at the front then the other participants are not supposed to follow the direction. Because of this, students need to listen carefully in order to know when to follow Simon's directions and when to ignore them. This game can also be used to train any vocabulary.

According to the national curriculum, teaching communication is very important because of the fact that it plays such a big part of knowing a language. The curriculum also claims that since communication is unpredictable in real life, students must get the chance to practice exactly that and not just to read premade conversations. In order to achieve this, the curriculum suggests games as a good method. Even though the importance of teaching communication is stressed in the national curriculum, some teachers seem to be lacking when it comes to actually teaching students to communicate. According to a study made on English teaching in primary schools in Karaganda in 2015 only 11 % of English teachers, who teach 2nd and 3d grade, always use the target language in the classroom, 65 % of them use it often or sometimes, and 24 % seldom uses it in the classroom. The same study showed that students did not use English much either. In fact 39 % of students said they seldom answered their teacher in English and an astonishing 75 % of students said they did not use the target language to communicate with their fellow students. Students look up to their teachers and when they do not use the target language inside the language classroom it should not come as a surprise that many students do not use it either. Games could be helpful in solving this problem because they call for communication, and they emphasize fluency instead of accuracy, which should encourage students to communicate because when the emphasis is on fluency students usually do not receive much criticism although they might make errors.

Fluency is an important skill to practice because it is what is needed in the real world, and in that sense it could be said that games provide a necessary connection between the classroom and the real world [6]. Although games in general might emphasize fluency the category speaking games can be divided into two main categories. Those categories are: linguistic games and communicative games. Even though they both aim towards teaching speech in the target language they put emphasis on very different things. While linguistic games emphasize speaking correctly the goal when playing communicative games is fluency [6].

Reading is an important skill to possess especially when learning the English language. First of all it is important because of the fact that to be able to write people need to know how to read. Secondly it is important for people if they plan to visit the country where the language is spoken because then they will have to be able to read, for example, various directions, menus, and tourist brochures. Thirdly, knowing how to read is important if students are planning on getting an education beyond elementary school because that requires reading [7]. This last point applies especially in Iceland where the majority of textbooks for university are in English. Because of how important the skill reading is it is crucial that teachers seek appropriate means in order to keep students interested. As with the other skills, games can provide diversity and help keep subjects fun and interesting.

Based on all of the information above it seems clear that games can and should be used as a teaching method when teaching languages. One reason why games could work well as a teaching method is because of the change that has occurred in teaching, where students have been becoming much more active in the whole learning process. Besides giving students a chance to be more active, games usually place the teacher in a background role, and therefore allow the students to take on more responsibility. It has also been made clear that games help create diversity and that can be very helpful in sustaining interest amongst students in the school. We have also learned that by creating diversity teachers are reaching out to a broader group of students and that is very important because students are individuals that differ from each other in so many ways.

Besides creating necessary diversity in the classroom and being a good method for teaching, we must not forget that games are fun and that helps get students active in their learning. I think we can all agree on the fact that no matter what teaching method is being used learning does not take place without the student participating in the learning process.

Aside from activating learners and creating diversity, games also create a comfortable and friendly atmosphere inside the classroom where students, especially shy students, might feel more comfortable in expressing themselves in the target language. Also games help students to get to know each other better, because many of them require more student interaction than other teaching methods might. Games can also be used to help recreate various situations from real life and therefore make the learning more real and give the students a sense of what they are doing is relevant. Another benefit to using games in the classroom is that children do mature through games and through playing games they learn many of society's rules and regulations. In addition when using physical games, children would get a change to get a necessary work out that is often lacking today, due to rapid change in our society.

We have discovered that although games are supposed to be fun and easy there are certain things teachers need to keep in mind when using them inside the classroom. First of all the teacher needs to do every-

thing in his or her power to make sure that all students have a good experience from playing the game. Also the teacher needs to keep in mind that not all games fit certain students and some cannot be played inside the classroom. When selecting a game teachers need to ask themselves, «What are the goals am I trying to achieve by playing this game?» and they have to make sure that the game they choose is not too easy but at the same time not too difficult. If teachers believe a certain game might be too difficult for their students they need to be aware that they need to augment the game to make it more fitting.

Finally, teachers need to make sure they explain all rules in detail, that during the game they do not interrupt the flow of the game and to plan some sort of a follow-up activity after the game. Also we have discussed the use of games in the four language skills: writing, reading, listening and speaking, and there were many valid reasons why using games might help train each specific skill. Writing games for example, help provide important immediate feedback that is usually lacking when students train their writing skills in a more traditional way. Listening games could offer an important and more exciting alternative from the boring listening activities that some of us remember from school. Games could make reading more fun and provide students with a reason to read, which is important because of how essential the reading skill is. For example people need to know how to read in order to be able to learn how to write. When it came to speaking games were able to serve the very important job of helping students train their fluency.

English language teaching in Kazakhstan has entered a new era with the introduction of primary English. There is an obvious shift of paradigm from the structural audio-lingual approach to a global approach to language education through activity-based learning in the primary school. Increasing numbers of teachers, teacher educators and researchers are now beginning to devote themselves to the study of language teaching with young learners. New textbooks are being developed and teacher training programmes at primary and secondary levels are being funded by both the national and local governments. Many teachers are beginning to realize the need to change their beliefs about language and language learning, and the need to acquire new skills and techniques in teaching and in assessment according to the new concepts in teaching and learning and according to the needs of their students. Research into primary school English teaching and teacher training are urgently needed to ensure a better understanding so as to better inform and improve practice [8].

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### Бастауыш мектеп жастағы балаларға ағылшын тілін оқытуда ойын технологияларын қолдану

Мақалада қазіргі таңда шет тілдерін ерте жастан оқыту – кең талқыланатын тақырыптардың бірі. Көптілді білім беру идеяларының мәнмәтінінде ағылшын тілін ерте жастан оқытудың маңыздылығы Қазақстанда күннен күнге артуда. Шет тілдерін ерте оқыту саласындағы көптеген жағымды үдерістерге қарамастан, әлі де шешілмеген сұрақтар кездеседі. Авторлар кіші мектеп жастағы балаларға ағылшын тілін оқыту барысында коммуникативтік ойындарды қолданудың мақсатқа сәйкестігін негіздеді. Оқытудың түрлі кезеңдеріне арналған ойындар кешенін ұсынып, оқушылардың коммуникативтік құзыретінің қалыптасуына әсер ететін факторларды талдаған.

Б.А.Жетписбаева, Т.Ю.Шелестова, Я.Таборэк

## **Игровые технологии в процессе обучения английскому языку детей младшего школьного возраста**

В статье отмечено, что на сегодняшний день раннее обучение иностранным языкам — широко обсуждаемая тема. В контексте идей полиязычного образования важность раннего обучения английскому языку возрастает в Казахстане с каждым днем. Несмотря на многие положительные процессы в области раннего обучения иностранным языкам, многие проблемы все еще остаются нерешенными. В статье обоснована целесообразность использования коммуникативных игр при обучении английскому языку детей младшего школьного возраста. Предложен комплекс игр для разных этапов обучения, проанализированы факторы, влияющие на формирование коммуникативной компетенции учащихся.

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