



The Role of Internet-based Techniques and Games as Innovative Materials in Teaching a Second or Foreign Language

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Abstract In the EFL/ ESL class contexts where there is so much risk of having a boring and unattractive atmosphere many educators enthusiastically embrace the use of Internet-based materials in order to help the learners have a better understanding of what they are going to learn. In this paper it has been tried out to discuss certain benefits and outcomes of using online language games in ESL/EFL classes. Following that, the issue of why, when, and how to play these games has been examined. Afterwards, the problems associated with using such games in language classroom such as cultural problems and the issue of time have been discussed and finally some practical examples of innovative internet-based techniques in the form of online games have been provided. These activities have mostly been designed for teaching vocabulary to EFL/ ESL learners, but modifying these activities, the material developer can have such Exquisite examples which facilitate teaching and learning of other skills.

Keywords EFL/ ESL, games, online, innovative techniques, internet

Introduction

Second language teaching and learning has always been a demanding issue in educational contexts on the part of both teachers and their students. Language learners, during the process of language acquisition, automatically take on a new personality and adopt certain new cultural values and due to this adaptation, from time to time, they find themselves in unfamiliar embarrassing situations which are anxiety fostering. The use of technology in language teaching and learning has been the focus of a series of recent review of research studies, including the evolution of technology and research CALL [1]. Supposing a knowledgeable fluent lecturer in a university who due to lack of communicative competence is not able to express his or her simple and basic ideas and opinions in a second language might picture us vividly the degree of frustration that a second language learner might experience during second language acquisition. Therefore it can be claimed that language learning with all its complexities can be considered as a threat to learners' ego and self-esteem. Because of this, seasoned language teachers have always attempted to equip themselves with useful and interesting techniques and strategies in order to cope with language learning problems tactfully. Year by year it has been so easier for teacher to equip themselves with the most efficient materials, such as video technology.

The technology in k-12 educational settings, primary and secondary education setting in most of English countries, is not provided as it might be expected in the digital age of today. In this case, there are fundamental problems in terms of systematical issues and organization in integrating this kind of educational media in schools [2].

Based on what Brandl (2002a) believes, in recent years, the use of the internet as a source for language learning materials has gained increasing popularity among language teachers. As the Internet continues to expand, mailing lists, newsletters, magazine articles and even keep pointing list and Web sites that can potentially be



used in language learning. Moreover, the literature on internet-based instruction reveals numerous personal accounts, surveys of students gathered informally or occasionally some pilot studies on the experiences of students using the Internet-based resources [3-5].

According to Chun and Plass (2000), "the use of networked environment for learning in general, and for second language acquisition in particular, raises many questions regarding the design of these environments that differ from the traditional design of text-based and stand-alone systems" [6].

Role of games in teaching

As impotent and useful techniques which can be employed by instructors in language class, language games could have an undeniably significant positive impact on the process of language learning. Game-based learning seems likely to become the most effective way to teach students fundamental concepts which would have previously been learnt via repetition and written exercises [7]. Bolter conveys his ideas through the concept of "remediation" [8] to refer to the process in which digital media make part of earlier media which is transformed in different ways. These innovative techniques though in different forms have long been part of activities which take place in successful language class. But before taking a closer look at an innovative technique in the form of a language game, I prefer to discuss several reasons for using games in language classroom.

1. Sometimes, activities and techniques which are conducted in language classroom don't seem to interest and involve our students sufficiently. As a solution, games can add interest to what students might find boring in the classroom. Maintaining interest surely leads to sustaining effort [9-10].
2. Meaningful interaction and communication is a key to success in language classes. Games can help establish a context for this meaningful interaction to take place even if they do not lend themselves to this interaction to play the main role in communication. The pre-task stage in which students are prepared to play the games and understand the games procedures before the game involve students in this kind of meaningful and genuine interaction [10].
3. At the beginning of this short essay, I mentioned some problems of second language learning which foster anxiety, stress and uneasiness for second language learners. The variety and fun different games bring to language classroom will lower anxiety and engage more introverted students in class participation in a way that their faces are protected [11].
4. Due to use of games inside and outside of the classroom, they are considered as invaluable tools for students to use language outside the classroom [12].
5. Through using games, teachers can tap students' multiple intelligences [13]. For instance:
 - Games played with others entail interpersonal intelligence.
 - Games involving drawing are related to visual/spatial intelligence.
 - Games which engage students in TPR activities concern bodily/kinesthetic intelligence.
6. Games are important enough to play a highly important cultural role in children's lives. It has been shown that they can be more motivating, challenging and engaging than the formal materials offered at schools and it is clear that they can provide more authentic learning experiences [14].

Of course there are some other reasons for using games in language classroom. The above-mentioned reasons can be considered as the most important ones. The teacher can utilize games for creating various contexts in which students need to take part in an interaction and convey their own ideas [10].

As Hedge (2000) claims that "learning through games could encourage the operation of certain psychological and intellectual factors which could facilitate communication heightened self-esteem, motivation and spontaneity, reinforcing learning, improving intonation and building confidence" [15]. Games can be used mostly because of their amusement and interest. Using the games in their classes, teachers can give their students more chances for communication [16]. Another important issue about using game in language classroom is the issue of "When?" and "How?" of using games. Time management in language classroom is of high importance. Students should see that not even a minute is wasted in ESL classrooms. Teachers sometimes manage to do easily whatever they replanned before for a session, but they find extra time at the end of the session. Under these circumstances a set of games can be used as filler. This strategy for bringing a session to an end has two important advantages. First, students make use of every minute in the class and secondly, using



games eliminate boredom and monotony at the end of the class. Games can also be used as a warm up activity as a pre-task stage in language classroom concerning the issue of how to use games. It can be noted that games are sometimes considered as separate entity in the class to which energy and time can be devoted. But in more traditional approaches to language teaching, games can be incorporated into a major framework for teaching language, for instance we could utilize games in PPP model in a way that games will be an essential part of practice and production stages [17]. One other important issue to consider regarding using games in the classroom is the place of game in children and adult ESL classes. Children, by their nature, are more interested in playing games and unconsciously could use games more efficiently. But in adult classes the instructor should be more cautious about selecting games which are consistent with adult styles, preferences and their psychological states. Adults may be unwilling to games because they consider games to be too childish. The teacher should try to discuss the benefits of games, emphasizing that games are not those useless activities for just having fun. S/he should try to enlighten them about "serious fun" as an inseparable feature of games which facilitates the process of learning.

The last but not least issue to take into consideration here before providing the readers with an innovative technique in presenting materials in the class is the types of language games and problem of using games at school. Hadfield (1999) discuss two ways of classifying language games. He believes that language games can be divided into linguistic games and communicative games. Linguistic games entail improving accuracy of language used by learners whereas communicative games relate to the development of student fluency during interactional exchanges inside and outside of the classroom [18].

Hadfield (1999) also used another taxonomy for classifying different language games which has many categories. Here, I do not intent to go to details and just mention the names of these categories. In his second taxonomy, Hadfield included different types of games such as: 1. sorting, ordering, arranging games 2. Information gap games 3. Guessing games 4. Search games 5. Matching games 6. Labeling games 7. exchanging games 8. Board games 9. Role play games [18].

Regarding the problems with using games at school and their limitation Macedonia (2005) writes:

Games also require time for essential repetitions. The duration of a game can vary according to the complexity of the targeted proceduralisation, but an average is about 30minutes. Often a given topic might require three or four games. In most schools in European countries, language instruction lasts 50 to 100 minutes; this encumbers the utilization of games or even renders it impossible [19].

Another problem that we might think of is related to cultural issues brought to the class during playing games. Students should be prepared culturally beforehand so that they can cope with cultural differences they encounter in the second language class. In this way they could become more flexible to be engaged in language games and consequently acquire language and culture simultaneously through playing games. After this theoretical information it's time to provide the readers with an innovative teaching device in the form of a language game by Shelley Vernon. As Gary Motteram (2013) claimed in the introduction of his article:

People are always tempted to try to make an argument for technology having an impact on the development of pedagogy and in many cases we can see that the use of technology has enabled teachers to re-think what they are doing. We also see people trying to populate this domain by talking about notions like the 'flipped classroom', ostensibly a methodology that sees input as occurring at 'home' and physical classrooms being used as spaces to explore what has been presented in the input. This is far from being a new idea, but these agendas are pushed for a while and then disappear again [20].

Going from teacher-centered to student-centered designs, the skill levels of students play a vital role the increase should also be considered. Students must have a minimum functional domain allowing them to explore an open Internet without the intervention as an instructor environment. However, the degree of teacher and student participation in decision-making regarding the choice of resources, the scope of the learning environment and comprehension tasks closely corresponds to the student's level of language skills.



Practical Activities

1. Online vocabulary games

One of the most interesting and at the same time challenging online games which can also function as a vocabulary can easily be found on <http://www.freerice.com>. As it is mentioned by the website itself, it has been designed in order to achieve two goals: “Provide education to everyone for free” And “Help end world hunger by providing rice to hungry people for free” the procedure is not that complex, easily after loading the website you can start playing and after each correct answer you will get a score based on how much rice you will denote. Sixty different levels have been predicted for this game but as the site itself claims it is quite rare for people to go over the fiftieth level. As a teacher we easily can open this website in our class, divide the class into two groups, make them aware of the charitable purposes of this website and let them enjoy.

Here are three other more types of activities that through innovative techniques try to help learners learn vocabulary skill more efficiently, these activities have been proposed by the instructors Bridget Dalton and Dana Grisham by the year 2011 in their article titled 10 ways to use technology to build vocabulary.

2. Animations with English Subtitles

If children are exposed to authentic material from the beginning of their process of learning, it may seem pretty easier to get a mastery over the target language in a fairly short period of time. As Karakas (2012) has claimed in his research over forty students in his own country, Turkey, learners would first improve their listening skill in this regard. Karakas (2012) mentions that “There have been a great number of supporters of the use of subtitles in videos and TV programs for various reasons” [21]. Then he gives an example of Danan (2004) who asserts that the audiovisual documents reinforced with subtitles can work as a powerful educational tool in many ways. As he asserts, (1) they improve the skills of listening comprehension of second / foreign language learners (2) facilitate language learning by helping students visualize what they hear and (3) increase language comprehension and lead to additional cognitive benefits, such as greater depth of processing. So as teachers we can utilize such programs in our class in order to let learners feel more comfort and interested in their process of learning [22].

3. Using Visual Representations of Words in text.

Since vocabulary relies heavily on the interaction between words, showing students the frequency and type of words that appear in text can help them think through word relationships. Free websites like <http://www.wordle.net/create> provide this type of word-mapping ability. Potential question to students could include, “What seem to be the most important words?” and “How do these words go together?” not to mention reading comprehension questions around main idea.

4. Digital vocabulary “field trips”.

A vocabulary “field trip” is when a teacher presents many different sources of text to students and has them pick out and record important words which are then brought together, grouped conceptually, and discussed in various word-work ways. A digital field trip puts this in students’ hands. Using free websites like <http://www.trackstar.4teachers.org>, teachers can compile websites about a topic and makes notes on the sites to help guide students (the authors give the example of an Alaskan weather search involving sites on dog sledding, the Aurora Borealis, etc.). The multimedia on the sites give students exposure to new words in many different modalities.

5. Let students use multimedia to show vocabulary knowledge.

The authors suggest that there is a world of multimedia out there that students could benefit from using to show off their vocabulary knowledge, for instance, by creating a podcast or short video explaining the meaning of new words. Another idea is that students could create PowerPoint slides with a picture that they caption to show the meaning of a word (the authors show an example of picture of three children working together that a student has captioned with a made-up conversation between the children that ends with one using the vocabulary word “contribute”).



How EFL/ ESL Teachers deploy internet-based materials in the class?

According to Brandl (2002b), Internet-based activities that have gained most wide-spread attention and popularity among language teachers and students are those in which the instructor provides a set of learning tasks that engage the learners in exploring reading materials in their authentic environments. The process of screening and selection of Internet sites may be the part much longer, making knowledge about search engines and how to use imperative. Usually, the Web sites operated by US individual associations (Language Teachers, the American Association of Teachers of French) List of the most popular search engines and a list of the resources of their languages. When it relates to technological skills, however, this makes the approach to integration based Internet more attractive to the middle class of foreign language material approach. Some experience with HTML editing program is necessary if the instructions and activities should be provided online, but most word processors allow the translation of a text file into an HTML document. An alternative strategy to provide instruction and online learning tasks is to make this information available through a spreadsheet [23].

One of the drawbacks of using authentic sites is that the instructor has to keep track of the functionality of the links. URLs sites change constantly and disappear. Therefore, it is recommended that alternative sites are provided, if some sites are no longer accessible.

Web-based projects can be carried out with intensity in a short period of time or expand in a few weeks. Overall, this approach to the integration of Internet-based materials lends itself to long-term assignments with students of intermediate and advanced language in the target language. For entry-level integration, exploring cultural readings can take place in L1 students.

According to Stockwell (2007), the choice of technology based on the educational objectives means that a particular technology is selected due to the characteristics that allow specific technology [24]. For instance, existing ones, such as MP3 players' technologies could be considered as more suitable for listen, and therefore the decision to choose MP3 players can be made on the basis of the technology has the ability to facilitate the acquisition or improvement of listening abilities. Alternatively, through experience in the classroom, teachers can identify a need to develop a particular application for use in a particular environment to achieve specific educational objectives, and develop this either by themselves or as part of a development equipment. Often, however, decisions about the technologies used are beyond control of teachers in the classroom, you are required to keep in line with institutional decisions. Institutions to make decisions about implementing technology general or a particular technology, such as a decision to bring in a management course as WebCT or Blackboard system, and expect teachers to incorporate these technology in their courses [25].

Conclusion

To improve second language skills and components, establish suitable rapport with students and have a friendly atmosphere in ESL/EFL classes, teachers should try to resort to any means necessary such as the games we tried to show their undeniable impact on learning. One of the most important and useful tools for achieving this aim is the use of different language games in ESL/EFL classes. As pointed out in Osuna and Meskill's (1998) study, students feel more engaged when the purpose of their tasks simulate real-world tasks. The exploration for any available multimedia resources should also have a purpose and be associated with a meaningful task. For example, instead of having students provide general descriptions of images or photos, asking them to identify specific cultural aspects and compare them to their own cultural background makes a task more purposeful and focused, and thus enhances their awareness and understanding of cultural differences. No doubt the large amount of real resources on the Internet provides students the opportunity to immerse themselves in a wealth of cultural readings. However, for the integration of activities based on the internet experience successful learning it requires effective organization and presentation of such information. The use of the web for the delivery of teaching reading or integration of Internet-based readings have to go beyond what the teacher in the classroom can offer to justify their use. The decision whether and how to use it, should be based on a clear educational justification, while technological and development issues must be carefully considered. The traditional vocabulary instruction of copying definitions, drawing pictures and writing example sentences certainly has its place. It's time to start looking for updated, digital ways to increase students' lexicons as well as their excitement about expanding their vocabulary. However for deriving maximum benefit which we have in mind



we have to take the issue of “why”, “when” and “how” to play into consideration and prepare our students culturally for the upcoming games and techniques and show them in advance the procedures used in playing those game. It is worth noting that the world of internet with its huge database can have one of the most undeniable roles in the process of learning if we take advantage of it based on our very essential needs?

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