

A Research on Game-based Education in a Young Learner Training Center in Guangzhou

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Abstract

In the past decade, increasing number of English educators have attached importance to game-based education, and many schools and training institutions have added games to English teaching (Pauline and Nicola, 2016). Many English teachers and education experts believe that game-based teaching is an effective integration of education and games, and its purpose is to promote students' learning more effectively. Piaget (1967, cited in Pauline and Nicola, 2016) believes that effective classroom games have the function of developing intelligence and effectively help students learn faster. Therefore, theories and researches on game-based learning abound. However, literature of teachers' perceptions on game-based teaching is still not enough, so this study investigates the perceptions of 24 children's English teachers from one training institutions in Guangzhou on game-based teaching. In this study, the English teacher stressed the importance of the game in the education environment, and the necessary of implementing games in the oral English course, but they also worried about the disadvantages of the game-based teaching, such as the classroom discipline and too much reliance on games among young learners.

Keywords

Children English Education; Teachers Professional Development; Game-Based Education; Young Learners.

1. Introduction

In the field of children's education in recent ten years, teachers in mathematics, English, Chinese, physical education and other subjects often adopt game-based teaching (Will, 2012). For investigating the views of English instructors in China on gamification in English teaching, this paper conducts a research in a language center of Guangzhou. The study finds that many English teachers in children's training institutions are aware of the significance of play in teaching context, as well as that playing games can help teachers to stimulate the atmosphere of classroom and effectively help learners to master English words and sentence patterns. In addition, they also acknowledge the significant differences in the relation of instructors and learners due to the different teaching roles and cultural discrepancy between Chinese and native teachers. However, in general, games can not only help students to better absorb new knowledge in English class, but also help students to improve their emotional ability and interpersonal skills. Hence, I have an optimistic attitude towards the deployment of games in English lessons, especially in oral English classes.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. The Development of Game-based Education in English Teaching

Game-based education originated from children education and psychology in Europe and America. As the cultivation of children's teaching, English practitioners pay more and more attention to the application of games in the classroom. A common view is that game-based teaching is to teach English through different games, so that children and students can acquire language knowledge in a relaxed environment. Children's play is an active structure that helps children to explore. This means that children can play to arouse their curiosity about the outside world (Piaget, 1967, cited in Pauline and Nicola, 2016). Therefore, if games are introduced into English teaching, game-based teaching can bring young learners' participation into the classroom. In addition, it also promotes students' learning motivation and reduces students' anxiety about speaking English (Okan, 2003). However, some literature focuses on the negative aspects of games, such as students' discipline control in games. Although there are some problems worth thinking about in the use of games, English games play an important role in children's English learning.

2.2. Defining Games

Many English educators and psychologists have been attempting to define games since teaching with games becomes a research subject. Byrne (2005, cited in Jabbar and Patrick, 2015) finds that games are interesting but subject to certain rules in classes. During play, learners apply language knowledge and communicate with others in target language, not just a playtime. Plato (1870 cited in Jabbar and Patrick, 2015) defines games as the simulation of conscious body movements that children need. Gulfidan and Kursat (2006) represent that play is an enjoyable activity to learn a certain skill. However, Will (2012) suggests that games directly obtain the stimulation of pleasure that comprises mental and physical enjoyment by taking part in group interaction. Therefore, various game definitions bring a great challenge for researchers to draw the conclusion to games. Although how to define games has always been controversial, I have spoken to English teachers who believe that bingo games, flashcard games and other games can be added to make students focus in English classes. After talking with many teachers from training centers, it is widely believed by teachers that playing games is essential to children's development and that it is natural for children to like playing games. The use of games in English education is not only an activity that conforms to children's mental development, but also an useful tool for young learners to study English, for games supply children with a chance to explore and acquire the language in the entertainment context. At the same time, some researches have demonstrated that young learners' brains are more plastic prior to the age of 12, which is a critical stage for young students to acquire English, and play-based teaching can enlarge children's merits in learning a language, such as better memory and stronger imitation (Desurvire and Wiberg, 2009). Therefore, in practical teaching, games serve as a bridge linking English as a language and children's mental and physical development.

2.3. Game Types

The classification of games has been developed in English teaching. Games are often used as physical games, dramatic/symbolic games, cooperative games, etc in English lessons (Drake, 2009). Each type serves a specific development aspect in classes. Physical play is beneficial to brain as well as body development, while symbolic games facilitate cognitive development. Numerous developmental psychology paper have shown that physics-based activities in British institutions can promote children's skeletal development and also strengthen muscular systems and internal metabolism. Besides, these activities can improve motor coordination and control, which lays a solid foundation for children's intellectual development (Prihartini, 2018). Secondly, drama/symbolic games refer to children mastering English storylines through

role-playing activities and understanding and communicating new knowledge and language in a specific linguistic context (David, 2009). Drama/Symbolic play is a student-centered teaching method used to develop children's communication skills. Students can practice their English through different story lines, and can dress in different occupations, such as doctor, engineer or accountant, for different occasions in different places. Symbolic play is a student-centered teaching method used to develop children's communication skills. Moreover, group playing appears the advanced stage of children's game development. Furthermore, cooperative games is another form of group playing that can promote contact and communication among children, enable them to learn mutual respect and cooperation, develop their ability to regulate behavior, and establish a good partnership (Erik and Sigmund, 2007).

2.4. Merits and Demerits of Game-Based Education in Children's English Education

At present, numerous educators investigate the effect of game-based education on children's language development, cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence development (Jarvis, 2010). We will further discuss the pros and cons of game education in children's English education in this passage. Firstly, games are beneficial to students' intellectual and emotional development. English classroom games are closely related to the intellectual and emotional development of children. From the perspective of intellectual development, if children actively take part in games, they will learn and absorb English knowledge without much conscious effort. Through observation, analysis, speculation, imagination and other activities, so that children's thinking ability in the game to be integrated. Secondly, games can improve students' emotional management ability. In many English lessons, games can be set up to stimulate team competition, get children actively involved, and assist some students overcome shyness and fear of interpersonal communication. At the same time, students can experience the fun of cooperating with others. In fact, plenty of research have manifested that games can enhance the development of emotion by offering a means of expressing emotions. Children can free out their negative emotions through body movements or express their emotions through role acting (Pauline and Nicola, 2016). During English lessons, children can feel peers' attention and social response so as to form a connection between them, which is beneficial to improving positive communication between learners (Glover, 1999). However, in addition to these benefits, I also discover that many English teachers in the game teaching will also put forward several major problems, such as discipline control, students rely too much on game learning, too long game time on knowledge teaching and so on. An English teacher said, "The teacher's lack of control in class will lead to chaos in class, and students may become too dependent on games and forget the purpose of learning." If there are no games in the classroom, they will lose interest in learning." Therefore, this paper argues that teachers can manage students' discipline problems by establishing game rules in gamification education. To some extent, this can help students better manage their learning outcomes.

2.5. Enlightenment of Game-Based Teaching to English Teachers

This research indicates many teachers mentioned the positive significance of game-based teaching to children's English education. For example, English teachers teach words through sports games, which is more effective than listening to language. Much of the literature agrees (Becker and Jacobsen, 2005) game-based teaching can keep students' attention. As a matter of fact, English learning is a complex process of knowledge accumulation and ability development. However, the attention of primary students is not easy to be sustained, so teachers should create conditions for language acquisition through games to reduce the learning burden of students. Secondly, the effects of game-based education on the relationship between teachers and students should be considered. Games can help teachers strengthen communication with students. In terms of the role of teachers in games, teachers are participants and promoters in

teaching (Becker and Jacobsen, 2005). However, I maintain that in the teaching institutions in Guangzhou that many Chinese teachers focus more on the authority of teachers and discipline in games, rather than seeking cooperation with students. On the other hand, western teachers regard themselves as promoters and are more willing to design student-centered teaching, encourage students to actively participate in group interaction and pay more attention to English fluency. Therefore, English teachers are expected to pay attention to their roles in the teaching. If teachers emphasize their authority in the game, it will not only affect students' freedom and fun experience, but also increase students' anxiety in the game. Becker and Jacobsen (2005) highlights that education is the real interaction between learners and teachers. In order to maximize the outcome of children's English learning, it is crucial for building emotional support and trust between teachers and students (Holmes, 2011). Therefore, the enlightenment for English teachers in China is that English teachers can adjust their teaching methods by referring to the role positioning of foreign teachers. In addition, we can not ignore the shortcomings of game teaching, such as classroom discipline construction. English teachers can improve classroom management by attending game workshops and reading classroom game books.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design of the Study and Participants

This study adopts the form of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. In this study, through the combination of quantitative questionnaire and semi-structured interview, the use of games in oral English teaching is investigated. In this study, 24 participants from an English training center in Guangzhou were investigated by questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. All of them have taught for students aged 7-12 and finished the questionnaire willingly. By doing so, I learned their general understanding of game-based learning. Then, I adopted online interview for five teachers. The teaching year of the teachers ranged from 1 to 10 years and their educational background was from college to master's degree. Of the 24 teachers, 90% were women, only 8.33% were men

3.2. Data Analysis and Discussion

The participants were teachers who had one year teaching experience at least and held college degrees above. In the questionnaire, these teachers were asked whether they employed games with different kinds in their oral English class and they understood teaching with games or employed games in English teaching from different channels, such as workplace and books. The research indicated that they had some understanding of game based teaching. Moreover, these teachers affirmed the positive effect of game-based teaching on children's English learning, especially in oral English learning. Moreover, 86.7% participants understood which stage of the game should be played in the classroom, and understand the role of games in oral English teaching. To be more specifically, when using open-ended questions to ask why they use the game, 85% of the teachers clearly knew why they used the game. Plenty of instructors have mentioned the reasons why they used the game, which could enliven the classroom atmosphere. Nevertheless, based the data collected, small portions of teachers are not ensure the reasons for employing games and with regard to the merits and demerits of game-based teaching, 20 out of 24 teachers knew and answered the virtues and shortcomings of games. For example, they consented that the merits of the game are to stimulate the atmosphere of classroom, maintain the interest and attention of learners, and promote students' oral practice, while the demerits are that the implementation of games in the classroom will take up a lot of classroom time. However, the answers from the questionnaire are monotonous about the reasons for the use of games and the pros and cons of game-based teaching and some of them may not a good understanding of using games and the advantages of game teaching in addition to activating the

classroom atmosphere and helping students learn English. In terms of disadvantages, many teachers think that games affect classroom discipline to a certain extent, and the implementation of games will take up a lot of classroom time. In addition to the above two deficiencies, this paper discusses the other deficiencies of game-based teaching. The reasons for this will be investigated in a semi-structured interview.

3.3. The Analysis of Semi Structured Interviews

Thematic analysis was adopted in this research. Firstly, This study indicated that in spite of Chinese teachers' belief that different purposes of implementing games can achieve different education quality. They mentioned that using games helps to activate the classroom atmosphere, test students' knowledge, promote learners' learning and build up confidence. But they also concern about how to accomplish learning outcome through games. Secondly, All participants were aware of the advantages and disadvantages of games in English learning. These teachers believed that game-based teaching is able to lead to emotional development, social skills cultivation, language and cognitive development, but also discussed the students' dependence on games, so some teachers do not use the influence of games in grammar classes and other courses. Thirdly, teachers also considered how to combine games with traditional teaching methods, especially in comparing the teaching differences between Chinese and foreign teachers. From these Chinese teachers' reflections, they may have a better understanding on the application of games in English teaching. Finally, this study found that every teacher had his own evaluation criteria to evaluate the effect of instructions with games, and realized that only mastering the language is not the only criterion to evaluate the learning effect. They also considered several aspects, such as teamwork, thinking ability, interpersonal communication, etc. This is line with different purposes of using games in the classroom.

However, the drawback of this research method is that the interviewees may easily be affected by the interviewers. For example, when I ask Chinese teachers what are the differences between Chinese and western teachers on game teaching, some of them will, under my facial expressions, think about how to combine games with traditional teaching methods. In addition, the interview data may be affected by the researcher's personal bias and research perspective. Gray (2009) discusses that the objectivity of qualitative data will be affected when interviewers encode, extract and classify data according to their theoretical framework of epistemology and subjectivity. In addition, Juraj (2015) points out that qualitative research seeks small target sampling. This denotes that the samples are not representative and may not be extended to large populations

4. Conclusion

To sum up, this study provides analysis and suggestions on game-based education for English practitioners. It is hoped that more English teachers can teaching with games instead of just traditional teaching with books. The drawback of this research is that it is not represented the whole picture of game-based teaching, for most of the subjects of this research only come from one training center. Moreover, this study only interviews teachers' opinions, but does not observe the real classroom situation, nor pay attention to students' feedback to the classroom. Therefore, the study of games in English education needs more researchers, such as the application of digital games in English education and teaching performance in the classroom.

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