



# The Attitudes of EFL Students Concerning the Use of Games in English Classrooms

Tu Thi Tuyet Vy

Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Phan Thiet, Binh Thuan Province, Vietnam.

**Abstract:** This piece of research was conducted at University of Phan Thiet (UPT) among 100 English-majored students randomly chosen from different classes. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire including 13 questions. The major findings indicated that most learners had positive attitudes and were more motivated to learn English classes in which games are used. Other findings also revealed that those learners were aware of the benefits of games for their English learning. Specifically, they thought that games helped them practice speaking and listening efficiently and remember lessons effectively. The findings hopefully will help to enrich knowledge in understanding perceptions regarding language games used for English learning, particularly in Vietnamese context.

**Keywords:** attitudes, EFL students, games in teaching, effectiveness, English teaching

## I. Introduction

For many ages, English has been spoken by a variety of countries all over the world and gradually considered as an international language. Nowadays, in the trend of integration, English plays an important role in developing countries, including Vietnam. English is used in several activities such as in business, at school, in interviews, in transactions, in communication, etc. For that reason, the demand of learning English is greatly increasing. Understanding that demand, English teaching activities are being developed much better in both public schools and English centers. In order to catch up with this trend, English teachers are trying to discover interesting ways as well as innovative techniques to attract students. Games are on the list.

Games are being popularly used in many EFL (English as a foreign language) classes and seem to be applied primarily to elementary stages of English learners due to its motivation nature. However, that application of games in teaching English is still unreliable since the issue of whether games have positive or negative effects on learners' potential on learning English is under discussion for a long time. Numerous scholars (Chan & Lin, 2000; Jiang, 2008; Kuo, 2008; Robinson, 1960) believe that by playing games, students' motivation and confidence are enhanced because they can achieve learning goals in a relaxing environment. In addition, Vossoughi and Clair (1994) said that "Psychologically speaking, games can remove those affective filters from the learner's mind and provide them with a practical motivation and instant need to utilize linguistic items". Moreover, some researchers suggested that games are able to offer as much as 16 learning benefits such as risk-taking, problem solving, interaction, situated meaning, exploration, team working (Gee, 2006). Meanwhile, some scholars (Chuang, 2007; Wu, 2002; Zeng, 2005) disagree about the utility games because of the students' anxiety created during many game playing situations. Besides, some teachers argue that game is a waste of time and is not an ideal means to get students' concentration on the lessons. In addition, the application of games in teaching English without asking for students' opinions may lead to the

lack of scientific and psychological nature. A full understanding of what students think about the application of games in English classes is highly essential and beneficial. With an insight into whether students are interested in learning English associated with games, English teachers may get some ideas of which approaches or methods should be employed in their classes in order to reschedule and adjust their lesson plans in a more appropriate way. Thus, the purpose of this study is to address two questions:

Questions 1: What are the attitudes of English-major students at University of Phan Thiet concerning the use of games in English lessons?

Question 2: To what extent do the students think games have influences on their English learning?

## II. Literature review

### 2.1. Definition of Terms

According to Salen and Zimmerman (2003), "a game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome" (p. 80). Meanwhile, Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richard, Platt, & Platt, 1995) defined games as "an organized activity that usually has the following properties: a particular task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players, and communication between players by spoken or written language" (p. 89). Similarly, Caillois (1957) demonstrated that a game is an activity that must have following characteristics: fun, separate, uncertain, non-productive, governed by rules and fictitious. Additionally, Costikyan (1994) stated that "a game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal". There is a wide range of educational games which is employed in EFL learning environment like computer games and online games. However, in this piece of research, only games in the classroom are discussed. Jacobs (n.d.) classified classroom games into more detailed forms. Those are sorting, ordering or arranging games, information-gap games, guessing games, dictation games, matching games, describing games, labeling games, board games and role-playing games.

### 2.2. Positive Effects of Games

Numerous scholars (Richard-Amato, 1996; Pound, 2005; Avendon, 1971) have proved that games exert difference positive influences on EFL learning. Firstly, games are believed to strengthen students' motivation. When playing games, students seem to be competitive and try their best to score points to make their team win. Therefore, they have a tendency to enthusiastically participate in the activities. This makes it easier and more natural for teachers to introduce new lessons or new knowledge. Secondly, increasing students' proficiency is considered as another good effect of games used in EFL classrooms. When playing games with a purpose in the situation provided, students have a chance to use the targeted language. As a result, students' ability in using language is gradually and obviously improved. Thirdly, Hadfield (1990) emphasized that games provide students with an opportunity for real communication. In many kinds for games, students have to ask and answer a series of questions to discover the keys. By doing this process repeatedly, they have a chance to use the structures and vocabulary in real communication. Furthermore, the use of games in EFL classes is also believed to enhance creativity, team spirit, problem solving and social skills as well as reduce students' stress.

### 2.3. Negative Effects of Games

Besides a diversity of positive effects of games in EFL learning, some scholars argued that games also cause negative influences on students. Particularly, Wu (2002) conducted a study investigating foreign language learners' anxiety in Taipei County. The result showed that competitiveness in games is one of the major sources of language anxiety. Wu (2002) found that when playing games, students are obliged to score for their team or they will be scolded by their peers, which results in higher level of anxiety among students. Similarly, after employing a questionnaire, Zeng (2005) stated that English learners' motivation decreases while their anxiety increases because their classmates keep pushing them during games. Similarly, the idea

that learners' anxiety increases due to the fear of being blamed by their team members, is also raised by Chuang (2007).

## 2.4. Previous Research Studies

For many years, there have been numerous research studies around the effects of games on EFL learning. Different researchers investigated different aspects related to the use of games in teaching and learning English. In 2008, Aldabbus Shaban conducted a study involving the use of language games in teaching English to Libyan learners in two state schools in Libya's capital, Tripoli. One hundred students were divided into four classes, two traditional classes and two language game classes. The study's design is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. By means of live classroom observation using computerized observation software as well as video recording, stimulated recall, semi-structured interview with teachers and the analysis of pupil-pupil talk during games, data was gathered and analyzed. The overall findings revealed that students who used language games were more successful than their counterparts in traditional classes in producing more and longer utterances containing English.

In 2011, Wang, Shang and Briody with the purpose to investigate the relationship between the use of games and students' English proficiency. This study employed quantitative and qualitative research methods and discovered that when learning with games applied, students achieved significant improvement in their learning motivation and vocabulary acquisition. Another research study conducted by Jafari, Madani, and Maghsoudi (2013) compared the impact of learning vocabulary items through instructional games against traditional method on vocabulary improvement and retention in Iranian EFL students. The control group was applied with the traditional method while the experimental group was exposed to games as a treatment. Before the treatment was provided, a pretest including 40 multiple-choice items were given, whose result revealed that the two groups were homogeneous. After the treatment, the posttest and the delayed posttest were administered. The result of the t-test showed that the instructional games approach was more successful in long term vocabulary retention than the traditional approach. In a recent piece of research, Sobhani and Bagheri (2014) investigated the attitudes of learners and teachers about the effectiveness of using games and fun activities regarding learning English. 40 students and 40 teachers from one of Shiraz language institutes were asked to complete a questionnaire with 25 items. After the questionnaires were analyzed, it came to a result that both learners' and teachers' attitudes were positive toward language games and they considered games as learning lubricants. Moreover, games and fun activities can help learners to become interested in learning.

In conclusion, for a couple of years, there have been several arguments and research studies concerning the influence of language games on the way students learning English. Some scholars said that games have positive effects on EFL learning. In contrast, some of them believed that games cause negative effects on students and their learning. Additionally, most studies conducted around the use of games in EFL learning revealed that game is the recommended method that English teachers should apply into classrooms because it helps students improve their motivation and proficiency in a relaxing environment. However, there are not many studies concerning the attitudes of English learners about the use of games in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Hence, the need to conduct this piece of research is essential. The result of this study is expected to be a helpful contribution to students and teachers those who are learning and teaching English as a foreign language in Vietnam. With the research results, teachers can probably know whether they are encouraged or not in applying games as a teaching technique in their classrooms, so that they have a clear idea of how to adjust their lesson plan to accommodate students' need.

## III. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Site

The research was conducted at University of Phan Thiet- the only university in Phan Thiet city, Binh Thuan province. The school has gained its long-term reputation for its well-trained and well-experienced lecturers and good facilities. Faculty of foreign languages (FFL) is one of the eight faculties of the University.

There are four grades in the faculty. Each grade includes from two to three classes with about 35-50 students for each class.

### 3.2. Participants

The study involved English – majored learners in FFL. They are randomly chosen from all the classes of the faculty including 100 students. They are learning English as one of the main subjects in the curriculum. Their ages rank from 18 to 22. The students chosen include 59 males and 41 females. All of the students are able to read and write in English. Moreover, they have general knowledge of English language. It was well controlled that these students do not do anything else at the time they doing the questionnaire. By means of randomly choosing students from different classes, the researcher hoped to obtain a wide sample research range as well as investigate the validity and reliability of the study.

### 3.3. Instrument

This piece of research employed a questionnaire in written Vietnamese as the only instrument. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions. Most of the questions are in the form of multiple-choice. Specifically, the first and the second question are for students' background information. The third is designed to know the frequency English teachers at UPT use games in their classes. Meanwhile, the purpose of question 4 to question 6 is to know the students' attitude towards the use of games and their feelings when they involve in games. Through question 7 to question 11, the research means to know to what extent students think games have effects on their English learning. Question 12 is a list of common games in English classes. The list is to discover students' favorite degrees for each kind of games. The last question is an open-ended question designed to know students' suggestions for other kinds of games which they would like to play in English classes. Among the 13 questions, question 4 to question 12 play an important role in exploring different aspects of students' view point on the use of games in English lessons.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researcher had the students do the questionnaire after having had their participation agreement. The questionnaire was delivered to 100 students randomly chosen. Students were explained every detail in the questionnaire, particularly the rules of common language classroom games such as ordering games, dictation games or guessing games. They were also reminded to think carefully for each question to have the most reliable answers. Then, data collected was used for analysis and evaluation of the experiment. The raw data collected was converted into percentage. The researcher based on the percentage of each point to analyze and find out the answer for the research question. 100 questionnaire papers delivered 100 students make up 100% response. Then all data obtained were converted into percentage and listed in tables.

## IV. Results and Discussions

### 4.1. Results

*Table 1. Students' attitude towards the use of games in English classes*

Students' attitude	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Students are eager to play games in English lessons.	57	26	15	2
Students are happy to play games in English lessons.	62	20	15	3
Students are interested in playing games in English lessons.	49	33	13	5

Question 4 and question 6 aims to find out whether the students enjoy games used in their English classroom. As seen in Table 1, a majority of the students (57%) said that they are highly eager to play games while the number of students who are not eager to play games only account for 2 %. Moreover, 62% of the subjects said that they are happy when playing games and only 3 % of them said they are not. As a result, up to 49 % of participants said that they are really interested in playing games in English classrooms, which is almost five times as much as the number of students who admitted that they are not engaged in such games.

*Table 2. Students' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of games in English learning*

Statements about the effectiveness of games in English learning	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Games are means of speaking practice.	45	43	10	2
Games are means of listening practice.	34	58	8	0
Games help students remember lessons more effectively.	47	35	14	4
Games are means of relaxation.	60	36	3	1
Games are a waste of time.	12	4	50	34

From question 7 to question 11, the subjects were asked about their opinions on some statements about the usefulness of games in English classes. Table 2 showed that most of the students express their agreements to the idea that games are means to practice speaking as well as listening, reported by 88% and 92% respectively. On the contrary, only a few of the students disagree that games help them to practice speaking and listening, reported by 12% and 8% respectively. Moreover, the number of participants agrees that games help them remember the lessons better (82%) also exceed the number of those who do not agree with the idea (18%). Particularly, in relaxation aspect, only 4% of participants do not think that games help them to relax. Meanwhile, the number of those who agree with the idea is much more significant, accounting for 96%.

*Table 3. Students' reactions for each kind of games*

Students' reactions	Strongly like (%)	Like (%)	Dislike (%)	Strongly dislike (%)
Information-gap games	35	42	15	8
Guessing games	36	33	22	9
Dictation games	30	37	23	10
Matching games	31	35	22	12
Describing games	52	33	10	5
Board games	42	40	14	4

Table 3 gives an overview of students' reaction to some popular games in English classes. As can be seen in table 3, the four figures for each kind of games are almost similar. In other words, most of the participants expressed their preference for the games commonly used in English classrooms. And the number of students who considered those games as their favorite ones exceed the number of those who didn't like them. However, in comparison to other games, the number of students who enjoyed describing games and board games are considerably higher.

#### 4.2. Discussion

When conducting the questionnaire, the researcher aims to find the answer for two questions: Questions 1: What are the attitudes of English-majored students at University of Phan Thiet (UPT) concerning the use of games in English lessons?

Question 2: To what extent do the students think games have influences on their English learning?

For the first research question, the answer is implied in the findings from table 1. A large number of participants show their positive attitudes towards the use of games in classrooms. Specifically, a majority of them said that they were eager to playing games as well as happy when playing those games. This finding seems to stand in sharp contrast with the findings of Wu (2002), Zeng (2005) and Chuang (2007). After conducting some studies, the three researchers found that students' anxiety increased when playing games due to the fear of being blamed by their peers. However, the finding of this study seems to suggest that most of students feel happy when playing games. Therefore, they are eager to playing games. The contrast between the findings of this study and those of the others probably lies in the competitive environments that teachers create during the games. For instance, a game which a big reward is announced in advanced is obviously more competitive than a game whose purpose is just for fun. In a game with a big reward, students tend to blame each other when their team cannot gain the reward. Besides, a long-term competition between fixed teams in a class also may cause high competitive situations. In general, the finding in table 1 is a clear answer for the first research question. Most of the English-majored students at UPT have positive attitudes concerning the use of in games used in their EFL classrooms. They appear to enjoy and engage themselves in the games.

For the second research question, the answer can be found in the findings from table 2. Firstly, the findings from table 2 would seem to indicate a general idea that most of the students have an understanding that games are useful. Unlike what the researcher expected, students tend to realize that games benefit them in some ways, rather than simply be activities of the lessons. Specifically, a large number of students asked agreed that games are a kind of speaking practice, listening practice and a kind of relaxation. Besides, most of them also think that games help them to remember the lessons better. This finding can be considered as a difference in the field. While most finding in the filed tend to emphasize on the motivation as a positive influence of games, the findings of this study look at new aspects of the effects. According to this study's findings, games may improve EFL learners' proficiency of listening and speaking. Games may also make it easier for English learners to remember the lessons such as vocabulary or grammar structures. Especially, among the four advantages of games, the relaxation effect is chosen by an extremely large number of students, which is reported by 96%. This high figure seems to imply that most of the students feel relaxed and comfortable when playing games. They appear to prefer English lessons with games than the ones without games for the reason that games help them to relax and feel less stressful by the amount of knowledge or information.

Additionally, through the finding from table 3, it is indicated that among some suggested games that are commonly used in classrooms, the students seem to prefer board games and describing games to the other ones. This could be explained by the simple rules of these games.

In general, the findings of this study suggest that English lecturers at UPT should think about using games as a popular activity as well as a helpful tool in classes for English learners due to their positive attitudes towards those games and a number of benefits that games bring to students in their English learning process.

## **V. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1. Answer to the Research Question**

According to the Findings and Discussion, a majority of English learners have positive attitudes concerning the use of games in English classes. Moreover, they understand that games help them to practice listening and speaking, to remember the lessons better and to relax.

### **5.2. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research**

Every research has its strengths and weaknesses due to the presence of some objective factors. This piece of research is not an exception.

The first strong point is that the results are concluded from learners' opinions. There have been many pieces of research on the effects of games on students' learning English and their attitudes towards those games.

However, most of those studies use observation or testing method. Despite some advantages, observation or testing partly depend on objective factors such as learners' at-home preparation, psychological or health conditions, etc. Those factors may affect the results. Therefore, the way the researcher conducted this study is considered as a difference in the field. This piece of research looks at the issue on the view of learners. Directly asking the learners' opinions on the use of games in English classes helped the researcher to gain deep insights into the issue and to ensure more reliable results. The large number of English learners participating in the study is another strong point. Because the answers of 100 students of University of Phan Thiet will be taken to make a conclusion for overall Vietnamese context, the more learners participated in the study, the more valid the results are.

However, the research also involves some weaknesses in the questionnaire that might partly affect the results. Firstly, with the purpose to explore students' opinion on the extent that games help them in learning English, the research only focused on speaking and listening practice and pay no attention to reading and writing practice. Although a wide number of games are designed to help students improve their listening or speaking ability, there are still some games whose aim is developing students' reading or writing skills. If reading and writing had been mentioned in the questionnaire, it would have been more reasonable. Secondly, the suggested games in question 13 are not diverse enough to give a full understanding of which games students like best. There should have been at least 10 games in the list in order to widen students' choices. Despite some weaknesses, this study offers some insights into English learners' attitudes towards the use of games in English classes and the benefits that they think games bring to their learning English process. Basing on the results of this study, teachers, educators, course book designers or school principals may have some ideas for their future plan if they have interest in the use of games in educational context. The results of this study can be a reference for those who want to conduct further research related to games and English learning or teaching.

### 5.3. Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

This section gives some recommendations which are based on the findings of the study. First, the result shows that a majority of university English learners have positive attitudes towards the use of games in English classes. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers, especially those who work with teenagers or adult learners, should use games more frequently and wisely in order to motivate learners and improve their proficiency through the use of games. Second, the result of the study is not solid enough due to some limitations. For this reason, the researcher recommends that further research in this topic with better design should be conducted to draw out a more solid conclusion so that more detailed recommendations are given. Although the result showed that most English learners have positive attitudes concerning the application of games, there are many other related factors further researchers can focus on to gain broader results. In particular, the questionnaire showed that a large number of the subjects admitted that they have more interest in board games than the other games. Therefore, effect of board games on learners' English learning can be a direction for further researchers. In addition, although the results of this study suggest that English learners are interested in games, it is not clear whether learners feel bored or not if games are applied too regularly in classrooms. Further researchers can go deeper to address this issue.

## VI. References

1. Avendon, M. E. (1971). Learning through Games. *The Study of Games*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc: pp 315-321.
2. Chan, Y. C., & Lin, L. C. (2000). *Competitive and cooperative games in EFL elementary school classroom*. Proceedings of ROCMELLA 2000, National Taipei University of Education, 123-147.
3. Chuang, H. Y. (2007). The study of foreign language anxiety, English learning motivation and strategies in the elementary school. Unpublished master's thesis, National Chiayi University, Chiayi, Taiwan.
4. Hadfield, J. (1990). A Collection of Games and Activities for Low to Mid-Intermediate students of English. *Intermediate Communication Games*. Hong Kong: Thomas and Nelson and Nelson and Sons Ltd.



5. Jacobs, G. M. (n.d). *Using games in language teaching*. Retrieved from <http://www.georgejacobs.net/MIArticles/Games%20for%20Language%20teaching.doc>.
6. Jafari, D., Madani, D., & Maghsoudi, M. (2013). The effect of using the instructional games on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary achievement and their retention. *Language in India*, 13(1930-2940). Retrieved from [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com).
7. Jiang, L. (2008). *The use of games in teaching children English*. Unpublished master's thesis, Shandong University, Shandong province, China.
8. Kuo, Y. L. (2008). *The effect of games in fifth graders' English speaking ability in an elementary school in Taipei County*. Unpublished master's thesis, National Taipei University of Education, Taipei, Taiwan.
9. Pound, L. (2005). *How children learn*. London: Step Forward Publishing, Ltd.
10. Richard-Amato, P. A. (1996). *Making it happen*. New York: Happer & Row Publisher, Inc.
11. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). London: Cambridge University Press.
12. Richards, J. C., Platt, J. & Platt, H. (1995). *Longman dictionary of language teaching & applied linguistics*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
13. Robinson, K. (1960). *English teaching in south-east Asia*. London: Evan Brothers, Ltd.
14. Sobhani, M., & Bagheri, M. (2014). Attitudes toward the effectiveness of communication and educational language games and fun activities in teaching and learning English. *Theory and Prattice in Language Studies*, 4(5), 1066-1073.
15. Wang, Y., Shang, H., & Briody, P. (2011). Investigating the impacts of using games in teaching children English. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v1i1.1118>.
16. Wu, G. C. (2002). *Foreign language anxiety of EFL elementary school learners: A case study in Taipei County*. Unpublished master's thesis, National Taipei Teachers College, Taipei, Taiwan.
17. Zeng, S. W. (2005). *The study of foreign language anxiety and English learning strategies in the elementary school*. Unpublished master's thesis, National Taichung University, Taichung, Taiwan.