



Using Games to Enhance the Communication Skills of Non-Majored Students at Phan Thiet University

Pham Quynh Hoa

University of Phan Thiet

Abstract: Using games as a teaching strategy has been widely recognized for its effectiveness in enhancing students' communication skills, especially in the field of English language education. This approach addresses the limitations of traditional teaching methods and promotes the implementation of the communicative language teaching approach (CLTA). In the context of Phan Thiet University, where non-specialized students are being catered to, the incorporation of games into English instruction becomes even more significant. This article emphasizes the importance of adopting the CLTA and provides insights into the drawbacks of conventional approaches. To assist English teachers in adopting the communicative language teaching method, the author introduces four diverse game types that can be readily applied in the classroom. These games serve as valuable tools for promoting active participation, engagement, and effective language learning among students. The article offers practical suggestions on how to effectively utilize these game types, thereby supporting educators in enhancing their teaching practices and maximizing students' language acquisition.

Key words: games, communicative language teaching method, enhance communication skill

I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous articles and studies have highlighted both the weaknesses of traditional English teaching methods in Vietnam and the strengths of the communicative language teaching approach. However, the overall state of English education in Vietnam remains unsatisfactory due to various reasons. This concern is shared by Phan Thiet University, which emphasizes that there is still a considerable distance to cover in terms of reforming the teaching of English and enhancing its quality in Vietnam. While new methods, such as the communicative language teaching approach, may appear straightforward on the surface, implementing and understanding it in the classroom setting proves to be challenging. Therefore, the discussion surrounding the use of communicative language teaching methods in the classroom should always be of paramount importance.

This article aims to shed light on the drawbacks of traditional teaching methods and explore an effective approach to teaching students - incorporating games into English classes. This method is regarded as one of the most efficient ways to enhance learning outcomes, as it actively engages students through classroom activities that foster communication skills. The author proposes to delve into the significance of utilizing games in English teaching and provides a list of four types of games specifically designed for improving listening and speaking skills among students. Finally, the author offers some considerations when employing games and shares success stories of their implementation in classroom settings.

II. TRADITIONAL TEACHING METHOD

The topic of English teaching methodologies in Vietnam has been explored by researchers Nguyen (2015), Hoang (2016), and Tran (2017), whose works offer valuable insights into the traditional teaching approach discussed in this paper. In the traditional method of teaching English, which has been widely used in Vietnam for many years, the focus is primarily on language knowledge and the teacher plays a central role in the classroom. Typically, the teacher starts by explaining new vocabulary words in the lesson, giving definitions and examples. This process involves the teacher explaining and translating sentence by sentence, and sometimes even word by word, to the students. After the vocabulary explanation, students are often required to read aloud or recite in front of the class. This is followed by translation exercises where students are expected to translate sentences from English to their native language. Essentially, the teaching approach is similar to that of mathematics: presenting new words, explaining related grammar, and assigning writing exercises. During this process, students are passive learners and merely receive information from the teacher. This method allows students to memorize a large number of words and grammar rules, enabling them to perform well in exams. However, it rarely provides them with opportunities to express themselves in the target language or to test their understanding of the information received in English when communicating with others. As a result, students often face difficulties when it comes to using English in real-life situations.

III. NEW TEACHING METHOD: COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

The communicative language teaching approach (CLTA) is a language teaching approach that goes beyond being just a method and is based on the theory of language and language learning. CLTA recognizes that language is a system used for communication and various purposes, with the primary function being interaction and communication. According to Canale and Swain (1980), the goal of language learning and teaching in the CLTA approach is to develop communicative competence. Communicative competence encompasses different aspects such as grammatical competence (knowledge of grammar rules), sociolinguistic competence (understanding social and cultural conventions), discursive competence (ability to organize and express ideas coherently), and strategic competence (knowing how to use strategies for effective communication).

CLTA places a strong emphasis on using language techniques that allow learners to use the language in a pragmatic, authentic, and functional way, with a focus on meaningful purposes. This means incorporating communication activities like miming games, picture guessing games, sound guessing games, and role-playing to engage learners in using the language. In CLTA, learners are given ample opportunities to independently use the language for communication purposes. The teacher plays a crucial role as both the group process manager and the guide for learners. The teacher organizes, guides, researches, and analyzes students' individual needs to provide effective language instruction. In essence, the essence of the CLTA approach can be summed up as "communicate to learn" and "learn to communicate." This highlights the approach's emphasis on using communication as a means to facilitate language learning. By focusing on real-life communication and meaningful interactions, CLTA aims to develop learners' overall communicative competence in the target language.

IV. WHY GAMES?

According to Rixon (1981), a game can be defined as an activity where cooperative or competitive decision-makers aim to achieve their goals within a set of rules. Games are enjoyed by both teachers and students, making them an ideal addition to English classes. Incorporating games in the classroom is the most effective way to generate excitement and is widely accepted by students. This approach enhances communication skills and provides a recreational and enjoyable platform for students. Regardless of age, using games in English classes helps students relax and enjoy using the language without fear of making mistakes. Stephen Krashen (1982) has demonstrated that affective factors, both positive and negative, impact second

language acquisition. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to play an active role in creating a conducive environment to engage students in class activities. Through games, teachers can provide easy-to-understand and interesting input, ensuring students' active participation and optimal learning. The use of games is particularly beneficial for weaker students, as they feel a sense of accomplishment when involved in game-based activities (Hubbard, 1987). Games foster communication skills and cooperation among students while allowing teachers to identify individual weaknesses and needs. Ideally, games can be integrated flexibly throughout the lesson, be it at the beginning, during, or at the end, with the aim of reviewing previous lessons, practicing language skills, or reinforcing learned concepts.

V. GAMES AND SHORT GUIDING TO PLAY GAMES

Games can indeed be a valuable tool for equipping and training students with various skills, particularly communication skills. They offer an interactive and engaging way for students to learn while actively participating in a fun and immersive environment. When it comes to incorporating games into teaching and learning, it is crucial for teachers to carefully select the right games from reliable sources. In this article, the author suggests four types of games from their published sources, including Carrier (1980), Kallsen (1982), Klippel (1984), and Porter-Ladousse (1987). These sources likely provide a range of game options that have been tried and tested in the educational context. By referring to these sources, teachers can tap into the expertise of experienced educators and researchers who have identified games that are effective for developing communication skills.

It is important for teachers to consider the specific learning objectives and the needs of their students when choosing games. Different games may focus on different aspects of communication such as speaking, listening, writing, or even non-verbal communication. By selecting games that align with the desired learning outcomes, teachers can create a more targeted and effective learning experience. Furthermore, using games from reputable sources can help ensure that the content and activities within the games are reliable, accurate, and designed to facilitate learning. This enhances the overall quality of teaching and learning within the classroom. In summary, games can be a valuable tool for developing communication skills in students. Teachers should carefully select games from reliable sources, such as the ones mentioned in the article, to ensure that the games align with the desired learning outcomes and provide an effective learning experience.

A. Miming Games

The core concept of the guessing game is quite straightforward: one person possesses knowledge that another person wants to acquire. The nature of the guessing game can vary greatly, covering terms, objects, actions, or anything else. Engaging in guessing games can greatly aid in the improvement of logical thinking and questioning skills for children. Miming games, in particular, have gained immense popularity due to their effectiveness. In these games, students utilize their bodies to demonstrate actions or statements that others must correctly guess. These games are suitable for all proficiency levels as they don't necessarily rely on extensive language skills. Additionally, they provide an excellent opportunity to review or test students' comprehension of new language concepts. Moreover, these games are inherently enjoyable and silly, which contributes to their appeal. When organized effectively, miming games can involve the participation of the entire class simultaneously.

In this discussion, we will briefly explore the methodology and key points to remember, followed by a description of potential miming games. To ensure clarity, teachers often provide one or two examples while giving instructions. Depending on class size, it would be preferable for teachers to divide students into groups consisting of 6 to 10 individuals. Students are tasked with miming entire expressions, such as "shut the door" or "take up the paper," or even titles of books or movies. Furthermore, students can mimic various situational scenarios, such as someone searching for their pens. To indicate the number of words being mimed and which specific word is being represented, students can use their fingers. To streamline the process, teachers can

distribute words on individual sheets of paper, face down, to each group. The group that either finishes first or successfully mimes the most words within the allocated time period will be declared the winner.

B. Picture Guessing Game

In addition to the various categories mentioned, picture games can also include activities like visual storytelling, where students create a narrative based on a given image, or image analysis, where students analyze and discuss the elements and meaning behind a particular picture. These games not only enhance students' language skills but also foster creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork. In the picture guessing game, instructors typically demonstrate a few examples to help students understand how to play. The game involves a large image that is initially hidden by small squares or tiles. Students must flip the squares to uncover parts of the picture and deduce its content. The objective is to correctly guess the picture in the shortest amount of time while revealing the fewest tiles. This game promotes visual perception, observation skills, and logical reasoning. It encourages students to communicate and collaborate with their peers and teachers as they discuss possible interpretations and make educated guesses about the hidden image. The winner is determined by the student who successfully guesses the picture with the fewest revealed tiles or in the shortest time. Playing picture games in the classroom can be both educational and enjoyable for students of all ages.

C. Sound Guessing Game

In this thrilling game, students can be divided into groups to compete against each other or participate individually. They are tasked with listening to an audio clip lasting a mere three seconds, requiring them to discern the sound, associated action, or its origin. Students are encouraged to express their observations using phrases or complete sentences, aiming for the utmost accuracy. This captivating game captivates students due to the ability of sound effects to evoke imagery of people, places, and actions within their minds. By sharing their thoughts, opinions, and ideas, listeners engage in meaningful discussions and provide answers. This type of game serves as a catalyst for stimulating students' imagination and critical thinking, while simultaneously allowing them to enhance their listening and speaking skills effectively.

D. Role-playing

At higher levels, teachers can enhance students' learning experience by engaging them in interactive role-playing activities based on characters from famous short stories. These role-playing scenarios typically consist of short 3 to 5 minute scenes, which can be either real or fictional. Consequently, this activity offers a wide range of situations, including everyday scenarios as well as discussions on hot topical issues that students find interesting. One effective approach to implement role-plays is by drawing inspiration from renowned literary works. After a lecture from the teacher, students can delve into the text, and subsequently be encouraged to bring the narrative to life through role-playing. This immersive activity not only enhances students' overall speaking skills, but also facilitates their comprehension and retention of acquired knowledge. Ultimately, role-playing provides a natural and engaging approach to language learning within a classroom setting.

VI. SOME HINTS FOR ORGANIZING GAMES IN TEACHING

To organize games in the classroom successfully, teachers need to pay attention to factors such as choosing appropriate games for each particular subject; preparing the necessary tools; giving specific and detailed instructions to students; Manage the game to ensure the fairness of the results.

1. Set clear objectives: Clearly define the learning goals and outcomes you want to achieve through the game. This will help keep the game focused on educational objectives.
2. Choose the right game: Select a game that aligns with the topic or subject being taught. Look for educational games that have interactive elements, problem-solving challenges, or content-related quizzes.

3. Explain the rules and mechanics: Before starting the game, ensure that all students understand the rules and mechanics. This will prevent confusion and maximize engagement.
4. Encourage collaboration: Foster teamwork and collaboration among students by incorporating multiplayer or cooperative games. This will promote communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills.
5. Provide feedback: Offer constructive feedback during and after the game to reinforce learning. Point out areas of improvement and highlight successful strategies or concepts applied in the game.
6. Reflect on the learning experience: After the game, facilitate a discussion or activity where students can reflect on what they learned and how it connects to the lesson's content or objectives.
7. Integrate game-based assessment: Consider incorporating game-based assessment methods, such as quizzes or challenges within the game, to evaluate students' understanding and progress.

In addition to the provided information, incorporating games into the classroom schedule offers several benefits. Games can be conducted at any time during class to engage students in a refreshing and interactive manner. They serve as effective warm-up activities, energizing students and preparing them for the upcoming lesson. Moreover, games can be seamlessly integrated into teaching moments, making educational concepts more enjoyable and memorable for students. Games also serve as a useful tool when teachers perceive signs of student tiredness or lack of concentration during studying. By introducing games in such instances, teachers can help invigorate students' focus and re-energize the learning environment. Additionally, games provide a chance for students to relax and unwind after extended periods of classroom instruction, refreshing their minds and ensuring a positive classroom atmosphere. The active nature of games is crucial to their effectiveness in language learning. Students actively participate in these activities, encouraging them to practice and apply their English language skills in a practical and enjoyable manner. Furthermore, games should be used as supplementary tools to complement the overall learning process, reinforcing the knowledge gained during regular instructional activities. By utilizing games, teachers not only enhance students' learning outcomes but also create an engaging and motivating educational experience.

VII. CONCLUSION

This passage emphasizes the effectiveness of incorporating games in English language teaching to enhance students' communication abilities. In this approach, students actively participate in playing games, providing a contrast to the traditional method where they passively listen to lectures and memorize vocabulary and grammar rules. The traditional method often fails to generate and sustain interest in learning and lacks opportunities for practicing vital listening and speaking skills. Despite the challenges associated with incorporating games in English language teaching, teachers can still utilize them to make lessons more engaging and impactful. Games not only create a fun and interactive learning environment but also provide meaningful contexts for students to practice English in authentic situations. Through games, students can improve their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and conversational skills, all while enjoying the learning process.

One such method that can be employed is communicative language teaching (CLT). This approach prioritizes the development of communication skills and focuses on meaningful interaction in the target language. By incorporating games into CLT, teachers can create opportunities for students to engage in real-life conversations, express their thoughts and ideas, and actively communicate with their peers. "Communicating to learn" and "learning to communicate" are two key principles that align with game-based activities. These principles emphasize the importance of using language as a means of communication rather than simply memorizing and regurgitating rules. By integrating games into these principles, teachers can foster a learner-centered approach, encourage critical thinking, and promote collaborative learning. In conclusion, the incorporation of games in English language teaching, along with communicative language teaching methods, can yield optimal learning outcomes. It not only makes the learning process more enjoyable and

engaging but also nurtures students' communication abilities, preparing them for real-life language use beyond the classroom.

VIII. REFERENCES

- [1] Canale, M., M. Swain. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.
- [2] Carrier, Michael. (1980). *Take 5 Games and Activities for the Language Learner*. Edinburgh: Nelson 's Company.
- [3] Harmer, J. (1985). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. New York: Longman.
- [4] Hubbard, J. (1987). *A Training Course for ELT*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Hoang, T. H. (2016). English Language Teaching Methodologies in Vietnam: A Study of Teaching Grammar in Secondary Schools. *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 4(3), 160-165.
- [6] Kallsen, Loren J. (1987). *Advanced Communication Games*. Edinburgh: Nelson's Company.
- [7] Klippel, Fredric. (1984). *Keep Talking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [8] Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- [9] Nguyen, T. D. T. (2015). English Teaching Methodology in Vietnam. In *A dialogue with the world: States, empires, and cultures in global interaction* (pp. 391-400). Brill.
- [10] Porter-Ladousse, G. (1987). *Role Play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [11] Rixon, Steven. (1981). *How to Use Games in Language Teaching*. London: Macmillan.
- [12] Tran, T. V. A. (2017). The Current Situation of English Teaching in Vietnam: A Case Study at a Rural Secondary School. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, 10(2), 192-204.