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Lingolabyrinth: Navigating Language Learning Through Traditional Games

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Abstract: *The article highlights different types of games and their importance in the language learning process. Although games are frequently overlooked and seen merely as sources of entertainment, they play a much deeper role in the development of cognitive and mental abilities. Additionally, by emphasizing the reasons why learners become bored with traditional learning process, the article discusses the crucial role of teachers in incorporating game-based lessons and fostering students' motivation and enthusiasm for mastering a new language. The article categorizes games based on the learner's language level and the skills they aim to develop. It includes social interaction games such as "Balls," "Wh – Questions," and "Circle," which help learners develop communication and language skills; games like "Spelling Bee" and "Protests", which enable learners to think quickly and accurately while forming correct sentences, and enhance their ability to spell words in a particular language; and other types of games.*

Key words: *Traditional methods, learners' enthusiasm, language level, disengagement, physical arousal, traditional game education program, kinesthetic movements.*

Introduction. Learning languages in the modern world is becoming a crucial part of society, as it connects people from different cultural backgrounds, facilitates idea exchange, and builds global connections. Furthermore, it plays an important role in promoting a particular language, encouraging cultural respect and value. However, learning through traditional methods is becoming extremely tedious for the younger generation. These methods, which have been used for centuries, typically involve teacher-led or formal lessons, where students are usually expected to listen to lectures, take notes, read textbooks, memorize vocabulary or grammar rules, and complete given tasks or tests. This approach often involves passive learning, where students have limited opportunities for interaction or

hands-on involvement. Especially when there is a lack of physical arousal at the lessons, students are bored and look tired. They are often regarded as lazy and are treated differently by teachers which may affect students' self-confidence. Thus, students may underestimate their learning abilities due to disengagement and their teacher's approach. Such one-sided lessons can lead to boredom, and students may lose their interest in learning new languages, particularly those who prefer practical experience or an interactive way of studying [7, 284–296].

A number of studies have addressed the topic of boredom in learning. According to the research conducted among Chinese university students whose major was not English and English teachers, learning through traditional methods has been proven to be uninteresting in foreign language learning settings. The vast majority of student participants recalled traditional learning process as monotonous and tedious activity. Additionally, each teacher, who took part in the questionnaire, described at least two or three episodes where students became bored during the lesson, along with the reasons that led to the boredom. The main factors of boredom that were mentioned were lack of interest, the repetition of the materials, not knowing the purpose of learning, disengagement, inactivity, restlessness, and other reasons [1, 241–253].

Another study that was conducted on Iranian students selected from two private language institutes in Mashhad, Iran, highlights three key factors contributing to boredom during the lessons. Although all three factors are important, this article focuses on *Factor 1: Teacher-induced boredom*, as it closely relates to the teaching practices under discussion. It is evident that the uncaring attitude of teachers toward their students' academic achievements or progress was mentioned quite often as the main factor of boredom in the classroom. Consequently, not only is the material provided in the classroom crucial, but also the teacher's approach and attitude play a crucial role in fostering learners' enthusiasm for mastering a new language. In addition, such factors as rote memorization, unchallenging activities, materials or tasks lacking clear purposes, a threatening environment, and repetitive tasks were also mentioned as the reasons why students became bored in traditionally taught lessons [2, 37-47].

THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL GAMES DURING LESSONS

In 2021, a study was conducted in which “*Traditional Game Education Program*” was found to be more effective than “*Traditional Education*.” The study group consisted of 72 children attending four nursery classes. They were assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). While 36 of them were in the control group, another 36 children were in the experimental group. The results showed that children who were taught in game-based lessons learned new vocabulary at a statistically higher rate than those in traditional classes [3, 74-81].

As a result, traditional games can be considered as one of the best ways to improve learners' interest in acquiring knowledge.

In this article, several traditional games suitable for learning a particular language are categorized according to the students' language level.

➤ **Beginner Level (A1–A2)**

1. “*ALPHABET*” Game.

In this game students are told a random alphabet letter or a word in the target language is spelled out by the teacher, and they must write it down as quickly as possible to earn points for their group. Children are divided into 2 or more groups, and they compete against each other. This game helps improve learners' phonics, speed-thinking, and their ability to work in groups.

2. “WH-Question” Game (“Who, What, When, Where, Why”)

Students are given a paper with the questions that contain blanks for certain words. Each student receives a paper with the same set of questions. Students must fill in one blank at a time and then pass the paper to the next student. There should also be folds separating each question from the others so that students cannot see what the previous student has written. At the end, students unfold the paper and read the completed version aloud, which often sounds like a sentence. This game helps learners improve their vocabulary range, keeping them energetic and engaged while learning. An example of what the paper might look like is shown in *Figure 1*.



Figure 1.

3. Playing with “BALLS”.

In this game, a student tosses a ball and asks a simple question (“What’s your name? or What’s your favorite color?”), the catcher answers and tosses the ball to another student. This game helps students enhance their listening, speaking, and response time, while keeping them energetic and reducing their fear of speaking. This aligns with findings from a study showing that kinesthetic movements has positive impact on learners’ motivation and well-being, highlighting the importance of physical activities in the classroom [5, 49–57].

➤ Intermediate Level (B1–B2)

1. *Karaoke* in the Target Language.

Students sing along to a popular song in the target language, optionally with lyrics. This game enhances learners’ fluency, pronunciation, and rhythm. Songs aid memory and improve students’ natural language flow, according to the study that found music to be an effective tool that plays a central role in language comprehension and development [4].

2. “*Spelling Bee*”.

This game is based on a traditional spelling game, but it has been modernized and made slightly more challenging for intermediate learners. Students must not only spell words correctly, but also translate

the given words, find their definitions, and use them in a sentence. Through this game, students can reinforce vocabulary practice spelling in a fun way.

3. “Circle” Discussion Game.

In this game students are asked to sit in a circle and discuss a set topic in the target language. They may ask questions, share facts they know about the topic, and exchange ideas with others, which helps build confidence. It helps them improve their fluency, communication skills and use of grammar during the conversations. Additionally, the study conducted in Saudi Arabia, highlights the importance of peer-working and its positive influence on students’ self-esteem and confidence in language acquisition [6].

➤ Advanced Level (C1–C2)

1. Game “Protests” (Critical Thinking).

Each student is given a statement and must argue against it using logical reasoning in the target language. They must talk in front of their groupmates and persuade them, aiming that the statement should be approved or rejected, but in case their groupmates do not agree, they may ask questions or offersuggestions. This game helps learners foster deeper cognitive engagement and encourage their thinking in the target language and forming arguments.

2. “Taboo” - Academic Edition.

In this game students are divided into several groups, and they are given cards with complex academic or cultural terms. Each card includes a target word and a list of taboo words that cannot be used when describing it. For example, if there is a card with a target word “Hospital” and at the back of the card taboo words are listed: “Doctor”, “Nurse”, “Sick”, or “Emergency”. The student who received card must explain the word to their groupmates without using any of the listed taboo words. Then group must guess the word. It helps students improve their descriptive language skills and fluency in the foreign language.

3. “Desert Island Scenario” Game.

This game can be played in groups or individually, depending on the preference. Students must choose 5 items (or people, books, skills, etc.) to bring to a desert island—and explain why. Others can challenge or question their choices. Depending on the interest of the students, teacher can change the topic. This activity helps learners enhance their critical thinking, expressing priorities, and fluency in the target language.

Although games are not the primary means of acquiring a language, they play an influential role in shaping learners’ enthusiasm and fostering their motivation *throughout the language learning journey*. Additionally, teachers and their attitudes toward their students’ performance are critically important in influencing learners’ approach to language acquisition, as students’ persistence in mastering a new language largely depends on their interest and passion.

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