

Educational games in the foreign language lessons at the initial stage

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Abstract. The article deals with the problem of the functioning of educational games in foreign language lessons at the initial stage. Although since the 90s of the twentieth century, the game has been actively using as a method of working at lessons, especially at junior school, there are still discussions concerning the game as a full-fledged pedagogical method: the educational function of the game lies in the focus of attention, namely whether the game is really an effective way of mastering the language, or is it just a way of entertainment that does not give or gives very little educational effect. The article contains a number of evidence that proves the legitimacy and feasibility of using the game, especially when it comes to learning a foreign language. The role of the game for organizing a relevant communicative environment, as well as stimulating the process of speaking, creating a situation of "unconscious learning" was noted. Scientific sources that cover the issues of play as a teaching method in foreign language lessons were analyzed; the emphasis was placed on the works of foreign researchers who conducted special experimental research and testing in order to prove the effectiveness of playing the game while studying English, Spanish, and Chinese. The pedagogical and psychological functions of the game were investigated, according to which various kinds of language games were typed. Methodological recommendations for using the game in foreign language lessons in the initial stages were developed.

Key words: educational games, foreign language, initial stage of studying a foreign language, stimulation of communication, active approach to language learning.

Introduction

The question of optimizing the level of knowledge acquisition by students is always relevant in pedagogy. The problem acquires some particular importance when it comes to the methodology of teaching a foreign language for students at an early stage. The main dilemma is to maximize the effectiveness of learning and skills building in a manner that meets the physiopsychological peculiarities of the development of senior preschoolers and junior pupils. K. Yurchenko notes that "...in the process of learning English, pupils develop communication skills within the communicative minimum, so the task of the elementary school teacher is to form a culture of communication and introduce a positive perception of the world of childhood into the process of learning a foreign language" (Yurchenko, 2017: 240). The overloading of an educational program of a foreign language subject at junior school and the excessive theorizing of knowledge, unfortunately, often make an emphasis on the first aspect, completely ignoring or even damaging the latter. Consequently, the harmonious studying of the language becomes impossible. M. Alfar emphasizes that "...the educators who will teach a foreign language to children should be trained with a system that children learn languages in a way physically and mentally different than adults do"; "...while teaching, one must take into account that children are not adults and that thus, the methods that apply to adults cannot apply to them" (Alfar, 2013: 2147).

Against the background of the described attention attracts such a method of organizing learning activities as a game. O. Khodii emphasizes that "...in primary school it is important to rise pupils' interest to study a foreign language, to cause them a positive attitude to the subject, to motivate the necessity and importance of using a foreign language as a unique means of intercultural communication" (Khodii, 2013: 191). The game, like no other method, has such transitional properties that allow it to become an irreplaceable marginal way of interaction in the classroom of a foreign language. It integrates the properties that are important for the comfortable physical and psychological development of the child, on the one hand, and allows mastering the language, on the other hand. Of course, the game, when it acquires all the signs of the teaching method, goes beyond the semantics of purely play and gets additional meanings, which are caused by its obtained pedagogical functions: "...at the lesson teachers deal with a special kind of games: educational games. They differ from just entertainment because of possessing a certain methodological purpose" (Khodii, 2013: 191).

It is also necessary to create a model of educational process in which the junior pupil will be surrounded by a fictitious, artificial, but linguistically properly organized environment that can most likely compensate for the lack of a real communication environment in which, as it is known, the language is assimilated in the best and the fastest way. Real / but absent, situations of natural communication in the environment of native-speakers under the conditions of the game are replaced by fictitious, but valid / present (based on the rules of conducting one or another type of game). As a result, playing is favorable for all the kinds of imaginary investment of reality" (Alpar, 2013: 2147). T. Shelestova, B. Zhetpisbayeva and D. Kazimov in this context emphasize simulation functions of the game, which increases greatly the effectiveness of the perception of the activities by young students in the classroom (Shelestova, 2017: 163).

During the current time in pedagogy the general course in the direction from traditional methods to activity-oriented is taken confidently. This course is a response to the needs of modern pupils and innovations in learning technologies "(Alpar, 2013: 2147). Of course, the given focus is intended to fill in the gaps and some lack of the effective teaching methods and methods of work that do not work properly within the traditional approach of language learning. The game in this case is a form or method of organizing a lesson that is especially effective for working with a group of primary schoolchildren / preschoolers. P. Kergomard, a well-known French educator of the brink of 19th and 20th centuries called the game "...the work of children, their profession, their life". In the field of studying and learning foreign languages, the game has been considered as an educational method of full value since the 90s of the twentieth century, when gaming activities began to be used more systematically and actively at language lessons. However, there are still discussions about the game as a learning method. The educational functions of the game get into the center of attention, namely whether the game is an effective means of mastering the language or it is just a means of entertainment that does not give or gives very little pedagogical effect.

Thus, the purpose of the article is to investigate the educational potential of gaming activity at the lessons of a foreign language at the initial stage of language proficiency. The stated goal involves a number of tasks:

- to analyze scientific sources that cover the issues of the game as a teaching method in foreign language lessons;

- to study the functions of the game, and according to this typify different kinds of language games;

- develop methodological recommendations for the usage of games in the foreign language lessons at an early stage.

During the research such scientific methods as observation, comparison, analysis, synthesis, generalization and systematic method were used.

K. Yurchenko proposes to consider the game as "...a variant-situational speech activity due to which pupils get the experience of communication" (Yurchenko, 2017: 242). M. Alpar stresses that the game is not only an entertaining means which is intended to fill the time that can appear during classes, but a complete independent method in teaching a foreign language (Alpar, 2013: 2149). The active use of the game method allows pupils to perceive a lesson as a game, that is, studying as if bypass, not accented, and therefore studying in the most natural way. At the same time, the educational effect of this method only maximally increases in such a situation. Moreover in comparison with traditional methods, the duration of attention and the period of concentration grow significantly too.

O. Khodii says that "...the initial stage of teaching a foreign language is extremely important throughout the whole school educational course. By this in a modern comprehensive school institution scholars usually mean the period of study, during which that foundations of the foreign language communicative competence are formed, which are necessary and sufficient for the further development and improvement of pupils' educational individuality. During primary school period occurs the formation of initial phonetic, lexical, grammatical and spelling skills and the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing within the framework of program requirements"(Khodii, 2013: 193).

I. Çakir mentions the interactive functions of the game, which, in the opinion of the researcher, must necessarily be supplemented by the functional of the standard study of the language by the textbook (Çakir, 2015: 69). A number of scholars (M. Alfar, N. Johar, M. Yunus, etc.) emphasizes that a game like no any other educational method or activity allows eliminating the stress factor and fear, which often significantly impede the pursuit of learning activities.

Extremely important for understanding the state of research of the game as a complete educational method is the existence of real experimental studies, which in fact prove the effectiveness of a game method in the lessons of learning a foreign language. Above have been already mentioned the features of the investigation conducted by N. Johar and M. Yunus. But actually there are much more studies like that one. For example:

- M. Alfar (Alpar, 2013) after the experiment concludes that the level of mastering the material is better in the groups where the method of language games was used;

- M. Taheri (Taheri, 2014) tested the game method in order to learn the vocabulary of the students and the result is as follows: the amount of lexical material acquired through the game activity is greater and, more importantly, it is less forgotten;

- V. Valipur and N. Assadi argue that games are important because they provide a motivational aspect, reduce the level of stress, provide the communicational environment that is very close to real (Valipour, Nader, 2014);

- C. Wu, G. Chen & C. Huang (Wu et al., 2014) are focused on computer linguistic games;

- Y. Ying, D. Rawendy, Y. Arifin (Ying, Rawendy, Arifin, 2017) use the mnemonic method in interaction with relevant computer games for teaching young students the

Chinese language; According to the researchers, the complexity of the Chinese graphics could be a significant demotivational factor, while the computer or mobile game method becomes the best solution in this case comparing with traditional learning.

Functions of the game as a method of activity in the paradigm of foreign language lessons at the primary school stage

Despite of all the shortcomings in the use of games in the pedagogical process, for many teachers the game as means of learning a foreign language is already an indispensable resource. O. Khodii positions the game as "a powerful incentive to mastering the language." The developmental significance of the game, according to the researcher, is inherent in nature of itself, because the game is always emotional, and where emotions exist, there are activity, imagination, creative thinking (Khodii, 2013: 191). The presence of cognitive interests among schoolchildren, who are stimulated through the use of game techniques, contributes to the growth of their activity at the lessons, the quality of knowledge, the formation of positive motives of education. In addition, O. Khodii draws attention to the fact that in the game especially fully and by times unexpectedly manifests the abilities of the child, which could be implicit in the conditions of traditional studying.

M. Alfar highlights such basic functions of the game as:

- the possibility of natural language usage (the proximity to real situations of communication that are in the authentic language environment);
- the ability to complement other types of work in the classroom with the qualities that are not inherent in the traditional methods of organizing the learning process; an incentive to express spontaneously (= naturally), use language creatively, mobilize vocabulary;
- the opportunity to acquire social communication skills and socialize through the use of language in the form of a game;
- the factor of reducing the training pressure that is present in the traditional language learning; instead of this a teaching process becomes more fun, free, more comfortable for perceiving by primary school pupils without any prejudice for the curriculum and general methodological requirements for language knowledge at the initial stage (Alpar, 2013: 2149).

The last of the above is a rather interesting feature of the game. Because at the time when, according to pupils' perception, they have time of leisure and some rest, in fact, they study new or fix already known linguistic material, learn to use it correctly, etc. So, on the one hand the attentiveness and activeness are increasing strongly while on the other hand, the level of children's involvement to the whole pedagogical process is increasing too.

N. Johar, M. Yunus (Johar, Yunus, 2017: 603) note that the game method can be applied to the study of any topic, that is, it is rather versatile if adapted accordingly. Using of the game method switches the organization of a lesson from a passive to an active subject-entity organization. The emotional content of the game produces the simulation of experience, the transformation of passive information into some active personal experience. The game also promotes the interaction of students, develops the skills of thinking, education in general (develops intelligence), strategy for solving problem situations. If the game also involves performing certain physical activities, it positively affects the physical development of the students and allows to distract from the monotonous sitting at the desk. That is especially relevant for the category of junior

pupils as their skills of assiduousness and sedulity are not formed at that age, which requires to switch different activities in order to keep their attention in such a way. The game allows uncovering the potential of all categories of pupils with different educational and psycho-emotional characteristics. In addition, the game creates an undoubtedly winning symbiosis of thought and action, teaches to respond promptly to the spontaneous development of events and challenges which the participants are faced within the game. The game activity teaches pupils to think flexibly, variably instead of stereotypically or schematically (Martinson, Chu, 2008: 478).

A. Talak-Kirik highlights some other peculiarities of gaming activity in language learning, which are quite limited in the traditional educational system:

- 1) creativity, independence, advanced way of thinking, individuality, variability;
- 2) the ability to combine different types of information flows and different sources of perception of information;
- 3) interactivity, skills to collaborate with other team members; constructive competition skills, ability to conduct discussions and tolerant competitions;
- 4) repetition of the previously studied linguistic material, consolidation of previously got knowledge, the use of vocabulary in typical and atypical communicative situations, the stability of the acquired knowledge and skills, skills to transfer knowledge and multiple data (for example, other members of the team);
- 5) filling the lesson by the "positive noise" ("good noise"), which is almost inadmissible in the traditional lesson.

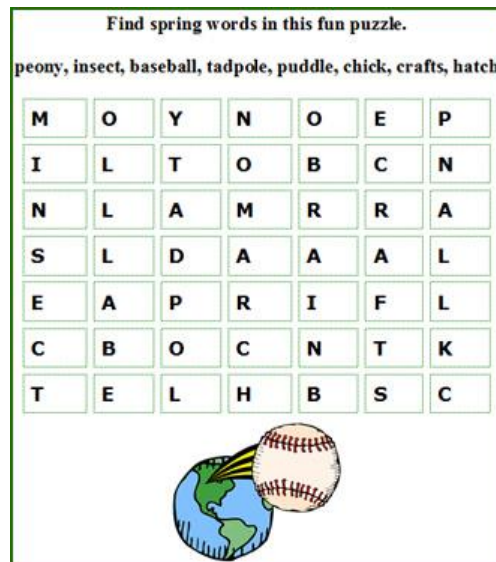
S. Saha and S. Singh distinguish the role of the game in developing leadership skills and collaborative skills (Saha, Singh, 2016). In the context of the game, each student has an opportunity to express himself. In the paradigm of collective work and adversity the weight of the individual contribution of each participant is not lost, which is quite unique and, without a doubt, positively affects the formation of the class as a harmonious, well-coordinated team. S. Saha and S. Singh singly emphasize the integrative functions of the game, when under the condition of playing the game can simultaneously develop four main spheres of language proficiency - speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Consequently, the game is conducive to the formation of linguistic competence in general.

Classification of games

In accordance with the functions and other leading features the game activities are classified. Games at the initial stage of learning a foreign language are more simplistic. At primary school stage of learning language, special attention deserves playing games on simple perception and reproduction of the material, and after these types of games very important role play special games on the development of students' abilities to identify, compare and confront phenomena and facts, analyze and generalize them, make correct conclusions, etc. (Yurchenko, 2017: 243).

O. Mytsyk proposes to classify the games by principle of achievement of the practical purpose of the lesson on:

- phonetic;
- lexical;
- grammatical;
- games for the development of reading, listening, speaking, writing skills;
- mobile;
- interactive, etc. (Mytsyk, 2003: 42).



An example of linguistic game. Internet resource:
<http://prek-8.com/holiday/spring/springgame.php>

The game can be used as a form of a lesson, method, mode or exercise. If the game does not take the entire lesson, it is most often used at the beginning or at the end of a lesson. Whenever game is used, it should not be qualified simply as a marginal / transient activity when the teacher or students have nothing else to do and should simply fill in a certain time interval with something entertaining but meaningless. The game should be perceived as a self-sufficient activity.

G. Selevko classifies educational games according to such criteria as a type of activity, a direction of pedagogical progress, game tactics, a subject field, and a game environment (Selevko, 1998). According to the differential principles of G. Selevko, one can distinguish the following types of games:

- 1) educational, training, monitoring / control, final / generalizing;
- 2) informative, educational, socializing;
- 3) reproductive, productive, creative;
- 4) communicative, diagnostic, psychological, etc.

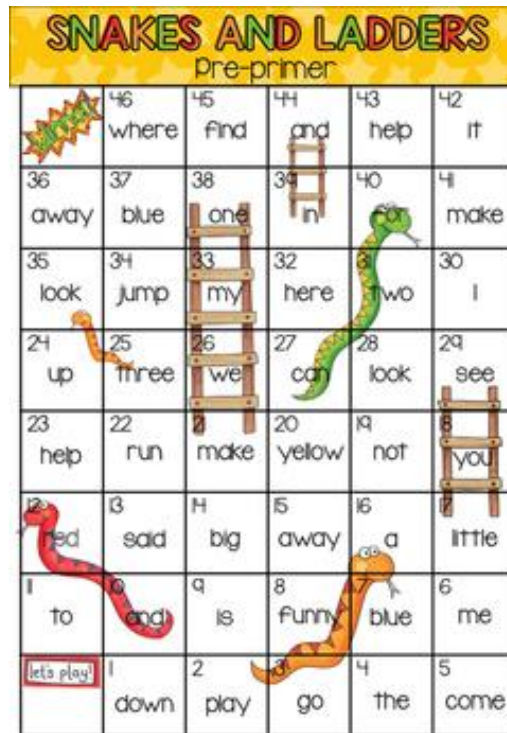
In addition, each game has its stages of organization and requires compliance with them. Pursuant to O. Mytsyk (Mytsyk, 2013: 42), these are a preparatory, executive, analytical, and correctional stage.

Conclusion. Methodological recommendations for using the game within foreign language lessons at primary school stage

O. Dunn draws attention to the fact that the early childhood age corresponds most to the study of a foreign language. This is because the psychophysical features of children in a correctly created learning environment, allow absorbing language material in the most effective way and during the shortest period of time. O. Dunn highlights a number of advantages of early onset of language learning (Dunn, 2011):

- use of innate language learning strategies, ability to simulate, imitate; with the ease and naturalness equal to those ones with which the native language is mastered; the study of a foreign language may be strengthened if the training is organized so that the child feels as natural as possible when learning the language and is also surrounded by a full-fledged / sufficient spectrum of speech influences;
- learning by model of game activity and through simulation of real life situations;

- children at an early stage, when the curriculum is less formalized and overburdened, have more time and wider opportunities for learning a foreign language in the form that corresponds to their age and peculiarities;
- language learning by children is more practical by its nature, therefore it is expedient to apply to the activity approach as much as possible exhaustively, rather than apply to vain rote-learning and standardization;
- educational strategies and inclinations in general are formed at an early age; so, properly selected methodology and organization of the educational process can greatly facilitate the study of not only one, but also other foreign languages;
- in childhood, the difference between native and foreign is less perceptible and distinguished psychologically, while at an older age the study of the second language is already complicated by weighty psychological barriers.



An example of linguistic game. Internet resource: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/278308451953003036/?lp=true>

The above mentioned factors of language learning at an early age are undoubtedly best correlated and implemented in the nature of the game method itself. Although the game as a form or method of organizing learning activities, at first glance, is a simplified form of pedagogical interaction and does not require special skills to use it, actually it is not so. The usage of a game requires the teacher to know the features of each definite game, the ability to organize the game in a particular pupils' group (taking into account both objective and subjective factors), the ability to use fully the educational potential of a game. A teacher first of all has to realize himself and bring to his pupils' consciousness that the game is a valuable element of the lesson. This will prevent from appearing unequivocally defeating opposition of the game and so to speak the "main" part of the lesson (Yurchenko, 2017: 242). Otherwise, children will not perceive the game seriously and it will hinder acquiring all the quality potential of participating in a game.

Hence, O. Khodii correctly notices that teacher in no case should show to pupils that he is more interested in the educational side of the game than the game itself. Teacher must laugh, rejoice and play with pupils, because the game will turn into a simple boring exercise (Khodii, 2013: 195). Teacher as a person who has a greater linguistic qualification does not directly participate in game, instead performs the organizational, controlling, regulatory function of the facilitator of the process. The task of teacher is to correctly distribute the roles in a game, so that the game itself as an action and method could take place and fulfill previously prognosticated pedagogical effect. It's worth taking into account that the game can have completely different effect, take a different time period and emotionally be different, depending on who participates in it. In the context of the lesson, the teacher has to follow the time frame. So the game is to be planned in such a way that the result becomes known for the time taken into lesson. Otherwise incompleteness will damage many of the previously described pedagogical functions and will contradict the very essence of the game. For the full-fledged educational functioning of the game, it is necessary to correctly, fully and clearly add rules, instructions and descriptions of the content of the game and the result to which participants must strive, as well as the possible benefits that a team or winning student will receive.

Ideally, the game should involve all students in the classroom. Even if the game happens between pairs of students, everyone must be involved. If the game is constructed so that some students lack the functions in the team, they can be provided with control functions, functions of juries or organizers. At the initial stages, it is important during the game to attract as many receptive perceptions as possible: musical accompaniment, visual accompaniment, physical movements, tactile sensations, etc. The role of bright gaming accessories is growing. An important point is to control the emotional state of the participants during the conduct of the game and after its completion.

O. Khodii notes that "...it is expedient to conduct games not only after the mastering of the educational material by the younger students, but also at certain stages of its study" (Khodii, 2013). In explaining the new material the game can help the teacher to solve two important interdependent tasks: to engage students in a new topic and make the contents of the subject clear. The game is also useful at the stage of controlling the learning of knowledge. Using games while checking pupils' knowledge of lexical units allows the teacher to approach assessment more creatively and involve all students in the classroom.

Thus, the game in the context of foreign language lessons at the primary school stage is an integral method of organizing the educational activities. Moreover, game method with all its features and functionalities exactly best suits the physiological and psychological qualities of older preschoolers and junior pupils. Despite the fact that numerous experimental studies have already been conducted and that they leave no doubt about the expediency of using the game, the phenomenon of gaming activity while studying a foreign language by junior pupils is still not disclosed enough exhaustively. This is primarily due to the general evolution of teaching aids and techniques, the phenomena of acceleration, changes that, in a lot of moments, radically changed the pedagogical process, as well as the cognitive features of modern pupils in general. This is, in particular, about the impact of computer technology and the Internet. All this leaves the problem of usage of game types of activity still relevant and stimulates further researches in a given direction.

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