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Language Teaching and Character Building

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ENCOURAGING EFL STUDENTS TO INTERACT: THE VALUE OF PLAYING OUTDOOR GAMES

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Abstract

Character building cannot be taught in only one specific subject, but it also shall be integrated in all teaching and learning processes of every subject. We should remember that English as a language is used in interaction; it means that students shall also understand the way to interact with others especially the way we shall behave in society. Games are fun and motivating, they lead to the use of language in real contexts. In games, students need to communicate and cooperate with others to finish the challenge. Students of English Department of Muria Kudus University, in their study tour, are involved in outdoor games. By giving them questionnaires, I expect that I can get information on how these games affect them. So in this paper, I intent to share ideas of the value of using games in teaching and learning English related to developing the students' character in social situation.

Key words: game, interaction, groupwork

INTRODUCTION

As part of a community, people are engaged to one another. we interact and communicate with others. This is a common phenomenon that we see everyday in social community. The process of communication occurs in all areas of life: home, school, office, super market, garden, and others. Through communication, we share thought, ideas, feeling, information, knowledge and so on.

In interaction with other people, we use language to understand each other. Fasold explains (1990: 1) "when people use language, they do more than just try to get another person to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings. At the same time, both people are using language in subtle ways to define their relationship to each other, to identify themselves as part of social group, and to establish the kind of speech event they are in". So when we use language to interact with other people, we shall not only understand the language, but we shall also be able to define ourselves based on the context of culture and situation.

In teaching English as foreign language, teachers shall not only concern to the language components and skills, but it is also important to overlook the fact that the students live in different cultural situation with the target language. How the teacher includes the cultural aspect in foreign language classroom determines the success of language learning. Freeman and Long (1991: 3) say that language teachers should extend the teaching process by knowledge of the subject matter they are teaching (i.e. the target language and culture) and by knowledge of the unique group of the learners with whom they interact.

Many Indonesian students probably learn English mostly in their classroom. They have to learn some English materials provide by their teachers which are commonly based on books. Based on the curriculum, the English learning should achieve some competences and materials, therefore some books are designed with several tasks. Meanwhile those tasks seem only emphasizing on the linguistic components, like; grammar, vocabulary and so on.

The learning processes nowadays should not only concern to the knowledge or the hard skill, but teachers should also pay more attention to the soft skill or character building of their students. Character building cannot be taught in only one specific subject, but it also shall be implied in all teaching and learning processes of every subject. We should remember that English as a language is used in interaction; it means that students should also understand the way to interact with others especially the way we should behave in society.

It is also important to connect the students' task and the environment where the target language is usually used. Task can be set as the environment for learning. Cameron (quoted from Tizard & Hughes) explains that students especially young learners are mentally active. They will try to find a meaning and purposes for activities presented to them. They work hard to make sense of what the teachers ask them to do (2001:12). From the environment, students learn what the language are for, and the attitude toward others in using the language. Attitude and behaviour toward other people in society are also determined by the process of learning English.

Many students are trapped by the problem caused by the difficulties of learning language components and the hard tasks which sometime can be very frustrating. To get the students' interest in learning English, teacher should be able to create challenging and motivating learning atmospheres. Brown (2001: 59) informs 'techniques have much greater chance for success if they are self rewarding in the perception of the learners. The learners perform the task because it is fun, interesting, useful, or challenging, and not because anticipate some cognitive or affective rewards from the teacher'. Games can be used as fun and motivating media in language teaching, moreover they lead to the use of language in real contexts.

GAMES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Wirght, Betteridge, & Bucky say that games provide a context for meaningful communication. Even if the game involves discrete language items, such as a spelling game, meaningful communication takes place as students seek to understand how to play the game and as they communicate about the game: before, during, and after the game. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information. (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005).

Ersöz (200) supports 'well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practise language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation'. Since the students are working in group to finish the game, they are forced to have intensive communication with other students in group.

Games are more student-centered. Students are trained to be more active in playing the games. Games can often be organized such that students have the leading roles, with teachers as facilitators. They have to manage themselves to adjust with other students and cooperate to finish the game.

Lengeling and Malarcher (1997) offer the benefit range of games from cognitive aspects of language learning to more co-operative group dynamics. From the affective aspect, game lowers affective filter among students. It also encourage creative and spontaneous use of language, since game are related to the language context. In playing the game students need to interact with other students, so it also promotes some communicative competences. Moreover game motivates the students because it is considered to give fun atmosphere. From cognitive point of view, game reinforces, reviews and extend the language teaching material (e.g. language skills and components). It also focuses on communicative grammar. Game are expected to arose class dynamics. It supports the students centered learning, in which the students are the center of the class activity while the teacher acts only as the facilitator. the students can build the class cohesion by cooperating with others. Each student is forced to take part in the game to foster whole class participation. In finishing the game, there will be competition among students. However healthy competition is expected. Game is more adaptable, it is easily adjusted for age, level, and interests of the students. It utilizes all four skills and requires minimum preparation after development.

Gardner adds that games can connect to a variety of intelligences (Gardner, 1999); in playing games with others, students involve interpersonal intelligence, involve drawing connect with visual/spatial intelligence. Games often have a hands-on element, such as cards, spinners, or pieces, which connect with bodily/kinesthetic intelligence. Game which is played in team encourage the students to cooperate with others.

INTERACTION IN GROUPWORK

In games, students need to communicate and cooperate with others to finish the challenge. In games teacher can divide the students into groups. This will give the students more chance to interact with others and work as a team. Harmer (2007a: 177-178) supports that pair work and group work will give a very valuable experience for the students since the teacher can maximize the students' participation in every activities. It is very effective in managing a class with large number of students where it is difficult for the teacher to make contact with every students and it is difficult for the students to receive individual attention.

Organizing students into group in a game offers the student a challenge to cooperate with other to finish the game effectively by neglecting the differences and competition among members. Group work also can arose the students' solidarity as they work and help each other. Harmer (2007b: 166) describes the advantages of goupwork as follows; Groupwork dramatically increases the number of talking opportunities for individual students. Because there are more than two people in the group, personal relationship are usually less problematic; there is also a greater chance of different opinions and varied contribution. It encourages broader skill of cooperation and negotiation and it more private than working in front of the class. It promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own desition in the group without being told what to do by the teacher. Although we do not wish any individuals in group to be passive, nevertheless some studetns can choose their level of participation.

Harmer also explains that groupwork has disadvantages. Not all studetns are enjoy in group work, some students may preffer to be the focus of the teacher's attention rather than being together in a group. The teacher sometimes feels that the class can be very noisy if some students lose control. Individuals may fall into group roles that become fossilised, so that some are passive whereas others may dominate. Moreover group can take longer to organize (2007b: 166). Although games have several disadvantages, they still offer some valuable experiences for the

students in language learning. It is especially in developing students' character in interaction with other people.

OUTDOOR GAME FOR THE ENGLISH STUDENTS

Church (2006) says that outdoor games will remind the students with their outdoor experiences in childhood, outdoor games are a highlight. Physical games are an essential part of the outdoor experience. These seemingly simple games are educational and content rich. When students are engaged in outdoor games, they are developing skills in areas including language, math, and science. At the same time, they are working out important social interaction issues so that they can play cooperatively and successfully and they think they are just playing a game.

The fourth semester of English department students of Muria Kudus University have a special program in their study tour. Beside visiting some educational institution, like universities and schools, the students have to participate in outdoor activities. These activities are well organized games which have been adjusted to some language learning objectives. These include vocabularies, grammar, understanding instruction, text type, and also all the language skill, like; listening, speaking, writing and reading.

The Kind of Games

1. **Word in the pipe game.** As the name implied, the participants/ students need to find the word inside of the pipe. The unique way of playing the game is that the students have to take the ball out of the pipe. The key word is listed on the ball. On the side of the pipe is holed and to take the ball students shall load the pipe with water so that the ball is lifted and flow out. To get the work done, one of the students shall fill in the water quickly and the other students shall hold the pipe and cover the holes to prevent the water from leaking. After they get the ball, one student reads the word (e.g. eat) and mentions another word which is began by the last alfabeth from the previous word. If the key word is 'eat' then the student has to find another word 'tea' and the next student can say 'apple'. This shall be done until all the mambers of the team get their turns.
2. **Balls instruction game.** In this game, the students have to get into the pool and take the balls to see the intruction. When the instruction say 'jump into the pool' the student have to do the instruction. This shall be done by all of the students.
3. **Wishpering game.** This game is set to check the students' understanding about procedure text. This concerns to the students' knowledge of doing something in sequence instructions in form of jumble sentences. In this game students also practice their listening skill by using their friends' voices. To start the game, the students are standing in line and given the message start from the student in front line. The student have to convey the message to the next student. It goes on until the last student who shall write the message. After all the messages are delivered, the team have to rearrange the jumble messages into a good procedure text.
4. **Balloon telling story game.** Ballons are placed in the midle of the pool. One of the members of the team shall swim and take one balloon then he/she bring it to the team, the students have to bursh the ballon and take out the paper inside of it. They have to make a recount text base on the topic written on the paper. When they get the topic 'unforgettable experience', the team shall compose a recount text about their unforgettable experience during their trip. The first student starts the first sentence, and the next students continue the story.

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRES

In order to investigate some aspects that implied in the outdoor game, I give the students questionnaires. These include their personal opinion about having outdoor activity, what moral value they can learn from the game, how they can manage themselves as the members of groupworks, and their expectation on the next outdoor game. There are forty respondents who are involved in completing the questionnaires.

These are the result of the questionnaires which focus on several aspects;

1. **Interest.** All the respondents answer that they enjoy the game. Students like to play game, it reminds them about childhood when they are happy and actively playing outdoor game. As the game are created and adjusted for some educational objectives/ school curriculum, they are expected to enjoy the game and at the same time learning the target language.

2. **Participation.** As the member of group/teamwork, students should understand their roles and functions. To investigate this aspects, some questions are made base on the game they play, for example, what did you do during the game; in this case the students answer their role in the game. In words in the pipe game, one or two students fill the pipe with water and the others holding the pipe to prevent the water from leaking. The next question imply the consequence if the students put their hands off the pipe. Some students answer that the water will leak and it means they will not get the ball easily. 'how could you work together to take out the ball of the pipe?' it is answered by the students that it will be easier if they cooperate with the others. After getting the ball all students have to find the related words.

In the balls instruction game all students should get in the pool and take one ball and collect them. The consequence if the students refuse to get in the pool is the group may not be able to finish the game or they will take longer time to finish the challenge than the other group. To finish the game effectively they have to maximize the cooperation among the group members. Finally to finish the game students shall do the instruction.

The students have to pay more attention and understand others, by listening to others. In this students stand in line and transfer the message to one another. If the students do not listen carefully they may not hear the message correctly and all students will convey the message incorrectly. One student's mistake effect all students. In order to finish the game perfectly, they have to listen to others carefully and concentrate to the messages. At the end the students have to write the message and rearrange the sentences.

In Ballons game, the group shall send one of their members to swim and get one balloon, after the group get the balloon, they pop the balloon and take the paper. To get started, the first student shall make a sentence and continued by other students to make a good narrative text based on the word in the balloon.

3. **The values.** It is stated before, that games have several advantages and effectiveness in learning language in various ways. Games bring in relaxation and fun for students, and games usually involve friendly competition and they keep learners interested. These create motivation for learners of English to get involved and participate actively in the learning activities. Moreover games offer implied benefits especially moral values in social interaction as those are played in group. From the questionnaires, students give illustration about the implied values of games. **Trust**; students shall trust the other students in group. **Fun**; students are having fun in learning language in game. **Activeness** and **speed**; kinesthetic awareness is an essential element of outdoor game activities. Games involve body/motor activity, students need to move quickly to compete with other students in different group. **Decision making**; students need to decide their role in the game. **Cooperation**; The team aspect of the games can encourage cooperation and build team spirit. In games, everyone has a turn, encouraging

- everyone to take a turn, rather than letting others do all the talking and other actions, and discouraging one or two people from being dominant. **Courage**; because each student gets the turn to participate, it encourages shy students to speak and take part in all activities. **Concentration**; in one section students should be able to determine his position/ duty in completing the game and concentrate on the activities. Concentration is considered to be easier because games are fun and the students are working in group.
4. Coordination. If we want to start an outdoor game, we have to make sure that every student has clear description about the game they are going to play. They have to understand their position and role in the game. When a student's role has been decided and the rules have been explained, he/she has to concentrate on the role and he/she shall obey the rules. What to do first to make sure everyone understands the rule and role is coordination.
 5. Advantages and disadvantages. Many students think that games promote fun and motivating environment in learning Foreign Language. These give them a break time from the routine learning process as they have to sit in their classes. Based on the students opinion, outdoor games also have disadvantages. Because this programme is done out of town, it costs more money and the students also have to travel away from their home. The games take long time with minimum English task.
 6. Expectation. The students hope that the same outdoor programme will be done at campus or in town. Some students also think that the outdoor game can be done in different location and not only in swimming pool. Some students also suggest that more funny games shall be give in longer period of time.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, outdoor games are fun. They promote motivating and challenging environment for language learning processes. Taking the students out of the classroom gives them more chances connecting themselves with nature. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practise language skills. Furthermore, they offer meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation. In games, students need to communicate and cooperate with others to finish the challenge. Groupwork will give the students more chances to interact with others and work as a team. Organizing students into group in a game offers the students a challenge to cooperate with others to finish the game effectively by neglecting the differences and competition among members. Group work also can arose the students' solidarity as they work and help each other. Although the values of outdoor games are not stated directly to the students, they unconsciously implement the values by cooperating, trusting, making decition, helping others, understanding and soon.

I suggest that games can be used as valuable media in teaching English as Foreign Language. In well-organized games, EFL students can learn all the language components and skills. There are many other benefits offered by outdoor game, especially in developing students' cooperative spirit. While playing the games, students are learning how to interact with other students as they are trying to finish the challenge. Hopefully the character building will be successfully transfered through integrated teaching and learning processes.

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