



Game as a Method in Language Teaching: Findings of a Teacher Survey

Ilka Lyubenova Birova^{1*}

¹Department of Russian Language, Sofia University St. Kl. Ohridski, Bulgaria.

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the game as an important method in foreign language teaching. The author analyses results of her investigation conducted in 2015 with 125 teachers of second / foreign languages in Bulgarian schools. Bulgarian teachers of Russian constitute a predominant segment of the teachers investigated, but teachers from Great Britain, Russia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Serbia have taken part as well. The results indicate a strong positive attitude to using games as a teaching method by all the teachers. But at the same time, there is insufficient use of game technologies in teaching practice and a deficit of playful exercises in foreign language textbooks. The author comments on some possible reasons for this and argues that the game method has to be actively used at all stages of second language teaching in combination with other teaching methods.

Keywords: Game; teaching method; foreign (second) languages; investigation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multilingual skills in modern world are valuable and language education has a strategic

importance. This article is dedicated to a problem in language education – using game as an integral method in foreign (second) language teaching practice of all age learners. Games

*Corresponding author: E-mail: ilkabirova@mail.bg

have increasingly become a focus of attention for researchers and methodologists in the field of language education [4,5,8,12,13] including the author of the present article [1,2,3]. Main features of game as a learning method and its advantages in comparison with traditional methods are underlined. Game sustains student motivation and interest and makes education effective and pleasant. The main purpose of this research is to explore teachers' attitudes towards the method of games and its concrete use at different levels of instruction.

2. METHODOLOGY

Select key findings are presented and discussed here from one investigation with Bulgarian teachers of Russian, English and other foreign languages conducted in 2015. Teachers from several different countries have also taken part in the investigation: Great Britain, Russia, Serbia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The following methods were employed in the present study: Analysis of resources and investigation, statistical methods.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Game as a Method in Second Language Education

At the onset, it is necessary to underline the author's point of view about the problem researched: we examine game not as an additional technology but as an important teaching method. It has a content, means and participants, organization, procedure and it is realized in practice through game technologies (playful activities, exercises etc.). In the teaching process the game method has to be combined with others in order to improve the quality of language education.

3.2 Main Features of the Game Method

The description of the game method distinguishes it from other methods:

- Game is an interactive method in foreign language education. It is based on playful interaction between teacher and students, between students and between them and a second language. Interaction can be examined as a combination of speech activity and another kind of teaching activities such as: rhythm, singing, drawing, pantomime etc [3,5,6,7,9].

- The use of games in foreign language teaching includes language and speech models in order to develop awareness of a foreign language and its norms and rules of usage (for example, games with homographs, antonyms etc) [7,14,15].
- The game method is realized on the base of role plays, simulations, presentations, creative tasks and playful exercises. In addition to language skills, learners develop in the process memory, logical and artistic thinking; there is a strong element of challenge in game activities and playful exercises [5,6,9].
- The game method is based on voluntary participation and optional choice.
- There is a positive emotional atmosphere of free action and playful enthusiasm, game activity stimulates students' communicative skills [1,8,10,11].
- The game creates a natural context in which language skills become necessary and useful.
- The game is very often based on information gap, i.e. there is something unknown in the game that has to be discovered or found out. (ex. the right form has to be found because it is hidden or presented in parts) [3,13,14].
- Active use of rhythm, music and songs in the teaching process; priority of the rhythmical organization of teaching materials [7,11,16].
- Gaming as a teaching method is used for the following purposes: Training and improvement of language skills, repetition of the material taught, active source of diversion and relaxation during the teaching process [5,12,15].
- The game method supports and develops the motivation of students of all ages to study foreign language and culture.

Through games it is possible to develop all language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. At the same time, associative thinking, cognitive and creative skills are stimulated and developed [3,10,12,13].

The use of game is an effective method in foreign language education. It has to be used in teaching children and adults as well, playful technologies have to be adapted to the level of the learners and to educational aims. In comparison with other teaching methods, games have a great advantage: They support students' interest and motivation and transform the

educational process into a real intellectual challenge and a positive emotional experience.

At preschool age, use of games is a basic method; in elementary school, it is fundamental and at the following stages it remains an important teaching method in language education which has to be actively used. Nowadays a combination of traditional and game-based methods is often observed. We think that effectiveness of language education depends on this balanced combination [1,2,3].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of an investigation among teachers in Bulgaria are presented here. The investigation was conducted in the period May-June 2015 with 125 teachers of foreign languages (Russian, English, German, Bulgarian, etc.). 108 of the teachers are Bulgarians (working in large urban areas and in the rural countryside), 17 - from different countries: Great Britain, Russia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Serbia. The investigation is realized on the base of sample at random. The questionnaire uses a modified 4 and 5-point Likert scale in responding to select statements (Likert items). The text of a questionnaire is given as an appendix.

4.1 Investigated Foreign Languages

In Table 1, information is given about the foreign languages investigated. The groups of Russian (45.6%) and English (35.2%) teachers are dominant and 4.8% teach both languages. It is necessary to notice the fact that in Bulgarian schools and universities, learning English as a first foreign language and Russian as a second FL is wide spread.

By means of a statistical method, it has been determined that there are no significant differences between different languages and places of residence regarding the answers of the teachers. It gives us reason to make some general comments and conclusions on the problem examined.

The results and comments about some questions in the investigation are given in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.

4.2 Teachers' Attitude toward the Game Method in Teaching Practice

The results show a strong positive attitude on the part of foreign languages teachers toward the game method in teaching practice. It can be

argued that this is demonstrably a general trend in teacher's attitude.

4.3 Game Use in Different Age Groups

The responses to Likert item 2 are given in a Table 3.

Statistically significant differences in age groups have not been found. The answers to Likert item 2 are moderately positive, there are 3.2% negative answers. This fact might be explained by some prejudices: For example, the game is not a "serious" kind of teaching activity, it might be used occasionally and only in teaching little children, not suitable for teaching adult students. Our point of view is the opposite: The game is at the same time an enjoyable and serious teaching method which has to be used in working with students of all ages and levels.

The teachers investigated have approved the use of different playful technologies in their practice (questions 5,6,8,9,10). The highest percentage (44.8%) determined is in regard to a playful technology described in Likert item 9. We positively estimate the fact that teachers like to present new words and phrases in a playful context, using the guessing method, not just giving them the 'meaning' immediately. This way we can develop language awareness in the teaching process. This technology is strongly related to learning of related second languages – such as Russian and Bulgarian, English and German, etc.

4.4 Presence of Game Activities and Exercises in Foreign Languages Textbooks

The Table 4 presents results regarding Likert items 11.

Regarding the responses to Likert item 11, there is no statistically significant difference between age groups nor between languages. The results give important information about the role of the game method in textbooks: In 32.8% of the responses, in all textbooks there are not enough playful activities and exercises and only in 43.1% are there sometimes such activities. This finding indicates that the game method is present in textbooks of different foreign languages but not in a systematic and regularly recurrent way. We would thus argue that there is a deficit of playful exercises in the textbooks. It means that the authors of textbooks underestimate the game as an important educational method which supports

students' motivation and speech practice at any level.

4.5 Self-Estimation about Using Game in the Teaching Students of Different Age

The results given in Table 5 show that there is a statistically significant difference within the

different age groups. The difference is between weak and moderate. This finding indicates that in practice more than 59% of the teachers usually use a different game method with students up to 14 years old and about 39% do so with older students. This result confirms the existing trend to apply games principally in teaching children and only partially in teaching adults.

Table 1. Foreign languages investigated

Language		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Russian	57	45.6	45.6	90.4
	English	44	35.2	35.2	35.2
	German	9	7.2	7.2	44.8
	Russian and English	6	4.8	4.8	97.6
	Bulgarian	3	2.4	2.4	37.6
	Russian and German	2	1.6	1.6	99.2
	French	1	0.8	0.8	91.2
	Romanian	1	0.8	0.8	92.0
	Ukrainian	1	0.8	0.8	92.8
	Russian and Ukrainian	1	0.8	0.8	100.0
	Total	125	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Results of a Likert scale survey on Likert item 1

The game is an important method in foreign language teaching which has to be combined with other teaching methods					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Strong agreement	74	59.2	59.7	59.7
	Agreement	50	40.0	40.3	100.0
	Total	124	99.2	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.8		
Total		125	100.0		

Table 3. Breakdown of results in Table 3 by age

			Age of students			Total
			Up to 14 years old	15 and more	Boath age groups	
2. Using game method is suitable in teaching children, as well as in teaching adults.	Strong agreement	Count	18	34	4	56
		% within age of students	40.9%	49.3%	40.0%	45.5%
	Agreement	Count	25	33	5	63
		% within age of students	56.8%	47.8%	50.0%	51.2%
	Disagreement	Count	1	2	1	4
		% within age of students	2.3%	2.9%	10.0%	3.3%
Total	Count	44	69	10	123	
	% within age of students	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Chi-square tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.470 ^a	4	650
Likelihood Ratio	1.982	4	.739
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.010	1	.920
N of Valid Cases	123		

a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.33.

Table 4. Results of Likert item 11, with cross-tabulation of student age

		Student age			Total	
			Up to 11 years old	12 years and more	Boath age groups	
11. In your opinion, are game activities and exercises sufficiently presented in textbooks that you use?	Never or almost never	Count	1	1	0	2
		% within students age	4.5%	1.2%	0.0%	1.7%
	Usually not	Count	6	29	3	38
		% within students age	27.3%	34.9%	27.3%	32.8%
	Sometimes yes	Count	9	37	4	50
		% within students age	40.9%	44.6%	36.4%	43.1%
	Usually yes	Count	4	15	3	22
		% within students age	18.2%	18.1%	27.3%	19.0%
	Always or almost always	Count	2	1	1	4
		% within students age	9.1%	1.2%	9.1%	3.4%
Total		Count	22	83	11	116
		% within students age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-square tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.642 ^a	8	.576
Likelihood Ratio	5.959	8	.652
Linear-by-Linear Association	.032	1	.857
N of Valid Cases	116		

a. 10 cells (66.7%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .19.

Symmetric measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.239	.576
	Cramer's V	.169	.576
N of Valid Cases		116	

Table 5. Results of Likert item 12, with cross-tabulation of student age

		Student age			Total	
			Up to 14 years old	15 years and more	Boath age groups	
12. Do you think that you use sufficiently game method in your practice as a foreign language teacher?	Never or almost never	Count	0	1	2	3
		% within students age	.0%	1.4%	20.0%	2.4%
	Usually not	Count	2	8	0	10
		% within students age	4.5%	11.4%	.0%	8.1%
	Sometimes yes	Count	9	27	3	39
		% within students age	20.5%	38.6%	30.0%	31.5%
	Usually yes	Count	26	30	2	58
		% within students age	59.1%	42.9%	20.0%	46.8%
	Always or almost always	Count	7	4	3	14
		% within students age	15.9%	5.7%	30.0%	11.3%
Total		Count	44	70	10	124
		% within students age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.464 ^a	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	22.397	8	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.256	1	.012
N of Valid Cases	124		

a. 9 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.479	.000
	Cramer's V	.339	.000
N of Valid Cases		124	

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion we can generalize that the use of game as a teaching method has a great and undiscovered potential in teaching practice. The results of our survey prove that there is a predominant positive attitude of teachers towards the game method in language education. But at the same time the game method is not used consistently and sufficiently in the teaching process. According to the teachers' opinion in foreign languages textbooks there is a deficit of playful activities and exercises. We think that reasons for such a "game deficit" are the following: overloading of the syllabus and lack of time for teachers; absence of game regulations in the teaching process; prejudices about games as an additional and "unserious" method in foreign language education.

We would like to underline our point of view that the game has to be explored as an important complete method in the practice of foreign language education. This method is necessary and useful with all age groups students at all levels. In educational context the game method might be the most efficient in combination with other teaching methods. We hope that findings of this article can stimulate second language teachers to be more creative and to use game more actively in their practice. The present investigation results can be used for further researches in language methodology and game technologies in this sphere.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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APPENDIX

Investigation for the teachers of foreign/second languages

Dear colleagues, this inquiry is connected with an investigation of the game as a method in foreign language education. Your opinion and experience is important for us. First you have to write some information about yourself without giving your name. You have to underline only 1 right answer in the relevant column. For filling in this inquiry, you need 2-3 minutes.

Please send the filled in inquiries to this e-mail address: ilka31@abv.bg

Thank you for your participation!

Place of residence.....
Institution (kindergarten, school, university, college, courses).....
Foreign/second languages you teach.....
Age of students.....
Age of teacher/lecturer.....
Male/Female.....
Date

1. The game is an important method in foreign language teaching which has to be combined with other teaching methods.

Strong agreement (SA)	Agreement (A)	Disagreement (D)	Strong disagreement (SD)
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2. Using the game method is suitable in teaching children as well as in teaching adults.

Strong agreement (SA)	Agreement (A)	Disagreement (D)	Strong disagreement (SD)
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3. Do you think that game activities develop speech and social skills of your students more than traditional training exercises?

Strong agreement (SA)	Agreement (A)	Disagreement (D)	Strong disagreement (SD)
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4. Active use of playful activities in education supports students' positive motivation and interest in other languages and cultures.

Strong agreement (SA)	Agreement (A)	Disagreement (D)	Strong disagreement (SD)
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5. In the teaching process, I use rhythm, music and songs to create a positive emotional atmosphere.

Strong agreement (SA)	Agreement (A)	Disagreement (D)	Strong disagreement (SD)
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6. When presenting new words, I use visual devices and acting activities including mime, gestures, pantomime.

Never or almost never	Usually not	Sometimes yes	Usually yes	Always or almost always
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7. In education, I use language games with the following aims: training, repetition of language material, active relaxation.

Never or almost never	Usually not	Sometimes yes	Usually yes	Always or almost always
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8. When I teach a foreign language, I use game activities such as: quizzes, problem- solving activities, games, simulation, dramatization - relevant to the age, language level and specialty of students.

Never or almost never	Usually not	Sometimes yes	Usually yes	Always or almost always
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9. I stimulate students to “guess” the meaning of unknown words and phrases in an interesting context instead of giving them instantly.

Never or almost never	Usually not	Sometimes yes	Usually yes	Always or almost always
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10. I stimulate my students to do free creative activities through foreign language (discussion of films, TV programs, books; reading for fun; project activity, preparation of student portfolio; communication in social nets).

Never or almost never	Usually not	Sometimes yes	Usually yes	Always or almost always
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11. In your opinion, are game activities and exercises sufficiently presented in text books that you use? (please note which books)

Never or almost never	Usually not	Sometimes yes	Usually yes	Always or almost always
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12. Do you think that you use the game method sufficiently in your practice as a foreign language teacher?

Never or almost never	Usually not	Sometimes yes	Usually yes	Always or almost always
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