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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
TO JUNIOR SCHOOL PUPILS

This study examines the innovations in teaching English as a foreign language to young learners at schools in Azerbaijan. The emphasis is placed on the role of language games. Specifically, they are viewed as efficacious techniques in the language course. The idea is pinpointed that since new pedagogical methods and strategies are conti-?uously developing and elaborating globally, their implementation in the education system of Azerbaijan may significantly improve the teaching and learning process. This given, a great interest has arisen in teaching and learning foreign languages in Azerbaijan. English as a foreign language has been taught in the majority of schools since Azerbaijan gained its independence. In this study, the quantitative research method – a survey in the form of questionnaire was used to evaluate the effects of language games in teaching English. The sample of this study includes 162 English language teachers working at different schools in Azerbaijan. The potential contribution of this research is being first of its kind.

Keywords: *innovations; teaching methods; language games; young learners; motivation; communicative skills.*

Introduction. Innovation is the way of realizing educational improvements through implementing new and distinctive activities (Carless, 2013). D. Carless states that "new pedagogic approaches", which include task-oriented language teaching, new teaching materials, technological advancement such as computer-assisted language learning, and alternative assessment methods are important innovations. In Cambridge dictionary, an innovation is defined as the use of a new idea or method (Cambridge dictionary, 2021). Local classroom environment and cultural aspects of the issue have an important effect on designing innovations in order to teach English as a foreign language (Carless, 2013). Relating to the English language teaching and innovations, B. Kumaravadivelu (2001) (as cited in Alemi & Parisa 2010) introduced the concept of "post-method pedagogy", which comprises three aspects – particularity, practicality, and possibility – relating to pedagogical innovations in language teaching. Specifically, particularity indicates the approach within which definite teachers and learners' groups should be the center of any language-teaching program. Practicality is explained through the relationship between theory and practice, which the former is generalized in the West and the latter is implemented in the East. Possibility refers to power and dominance in which teachers become the source of information who convey the knowledge to learners.

According to D. Carless (2013), applying an innovation to teaching can be challenging in terms of three major reasons – teacher-related, system-related, and school-related. Teacher-related problem is connected with a teacher's existing values, beliefs, emotional condition, and skills, while system-related problems occur when there is a lack of re-

sources to finalize the innovation and support for teachers. School-related reasons reflect a lacking support for cultural changes. Based on B. Kumaravadivelu's strategic method (1994) (as cited in Alemi & Parisa 2010), the importance of 10 essential macro strategies is maintained in language teaching. Among them the following can be identified:

- increasing learning opportunities,
- reducing perceptual mismatches,
- helping negotiated interaction,
- encouraging learner autonomy,
- increasing language awareness,
- activating self-discovery,
- conceptualizing linguistic input,
- integrating language skills,
- ensuring social relevance,
- raising cultural consciousness.

Pursuant to the prominent educationalists, creativity is the crucial element of teaching languages via innovative activities (Naiman, 1998 as cited in Avila, 2015). Regarding this, creativity can be realized through the processes of thinking and producing in the classroom environment. In this case, teachers should implement their ideas in order to realize creativity; otherwise, ideas are merely the imagination, not creativity.

Furthermore, language learners can improve their English writing and speaking skills with the help of language games (Constantinescu, 2012, as cited in Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016). B. Klimova (2015) asserts that gaming is a useful tool to find out learners' weaknesses in obtaining language proficiency. According to J.F. Lee (1995) (as cited in Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016), learning foreign languages through games creates an enjoyable atmosphere and motivate language learners to successfully communicate with their classmates in the target language. L. Hong (2002) (as cited in Klimova, 2015) also maintains that besides having clear rules and final goals that are well-determined, one of the important elements of successful language games is that foreign language learners enjoy playing language games while studying.

Literature Review. Language is a game; it is based on certain rules as an entertaining activity (Wittgestein as cited in Reinhardt, 2019). Motivation is the basis of successful language learning. It can also enhance reaching the goal with teachers' skills (Hadfield & Dörneyi, 2013). R.C. Gardner (2001) (as cited in Bower, 2017) claims that a learner who is motivated will show "effort, desire and positive emotional outcome" through the learning process. In her study, Ş. Korkmaz (2013) emphasizes that language learners concentrate on the enjoyable content of language games, which naturally motivates them rather than language-related aspects of games.

Regarding the nature of games, J. Reinhardt (2019) states that three important aspects of the game – format, genre, and element – should be taken into account concerning their classification. The format of a game is related to the designs of games and the ways of playing them. When it comes to a game genre, it can be grouped as certain categories in which games are classified based on similar mechanisms, player behavior, and themes. Game elements include mechanics, which are the designed steps to follow so as to reach the set goals, game dynamics that occur through the process of interaction with different games, and player's behavior, motivation, and attitude of the mind that are unpredictable before a game. In connection with the classification of games, J. Hadfield (1998) (as cited in Klimova, 2015) categorized language games into linguistic games and communicative games. Linguistic games concentrate on accuracy, while communicative games point out the successful exchange of information.

Using stories in teaching English is one of the pedagogical methods, which helps young learners improve their conversational skills through interpreting characters in stories. The approach of utilizing stories in the English language teaching within the context of role-playing facilitates the process of interaction, development of communicative skills, understanding the other learners' interpretation, and helping learn to overcome boredom (Anburaj, Christopher & Ming, 2014). Concerning foreign language teaching, another way to apply games to language teaching is screenwriting in which learners rely on their imagination while producing a story. This method helps students boost their vocabulary and learn grammar (Argentini, 1998 as cited in Avila, 2015). Moreover, S.Sh. Baw (2002) (as cited in Alemi & Parisa 2010) supports the idea of using "gossiping" method to provide opportunities for young learners who are reluctant to speak English. Through using this method, teachers aim at giving preference to oral practice for motivating shy learners. In foreign language teaching, one of the widely-used games is "Twister", which aims at contributing to EFL elementary level of language learners (as cited in Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016).

Definitions of the Key Terms

This section represents the explanations of key terms – variables of this study to assist readers throughout the study when reading and interpreting the results.

Language games are the methods, which are designed to integrate language-related knowledge and communicative skills.

Motivation is defined as enthusiasm for doing something (Cambridge dictionary, 2021).

Creativity is the use of skills and imagination to produce something new or to produce art (Oxford learners dictionaries, 2021).

Communicative skills are the ability to convey information and ideas effectively (Collins dictionary, 2021).

Questions of the Research

1. What effects does the use of language games have on learners' motivation?

2. How effective are language games in developing learners' communicative skills?

Methodology. The appliance of innovations in teaching English as a foreign language in the example of language games was analyzed through the use of an online survey carried out in Google Forms. Quantitative research methods in the form of a questionnaire and non-probability sampling method were used to answer the research questions. Based on the previous study and literature review, the author designed the Likert scale questions to measure to what extent using language games in teaching English is effective.

The participants of this study are all English language teachers working at schools in Azerbaijan. A total of 162 respondents took part in this research. A self-selection sampling method was utilized to select respondents. A total of 10 questions relating to various aspects of utilizing language games in English language classes was included in the questionnaire.

Results. This research revealed the results of the investigation of the use of language games in teaching English for young learners as a foreign language in primary schools in Azerbaijan. Based on the previous studies, the author has determined the independent and dependent variables. In this research, the independent variable is the use of language games, while the dependent variables are the young learners' motivation and communicative skills.

The first question item in the questionnaire is the number of years of working experience of an individual teacher. The number of teachers who have 1-5 years of experience is 35 people (21.6%) and 45 teachers (27.8%) said that they have 6-11 years of experience. A little less than a third of teachers taught at school has 12-20 years of experience, while the proportion of the teachers who have more than 20 years of experience is 20.4%.
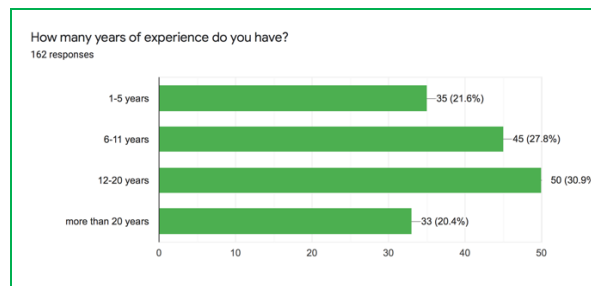

The levels of formal education – college, bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctoral or professional degree (e.g., Ph.D) are included in the second question. The majority of teachers (67.9%) said that the highest level of education they completed is the bachelor's degree. Only 38 people (23.5%) completed the master's degree and five out of 162 teachers obtained the doctoral or professional degree (e.g., Ph.D). A small proportion of teachers, which is 8.6% completed the college degree.
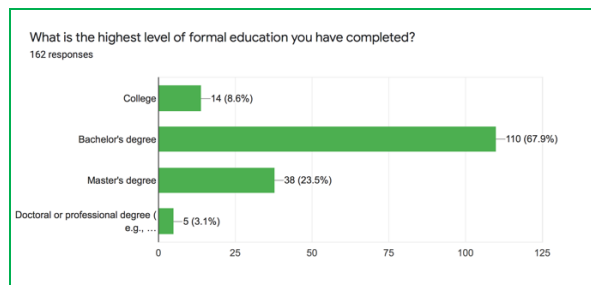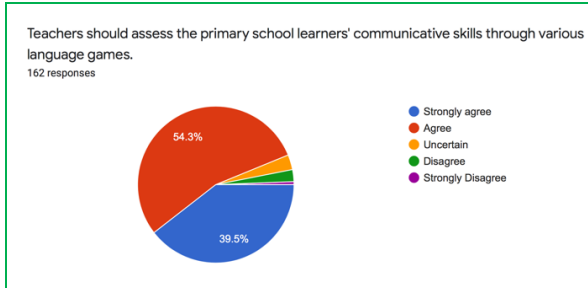

The respondents were also asked about the attendance of teacher training programs. The vast majority of participants (89%) said that they completed teacher training programs, whereas merely 10.8% did not attend these trainings.
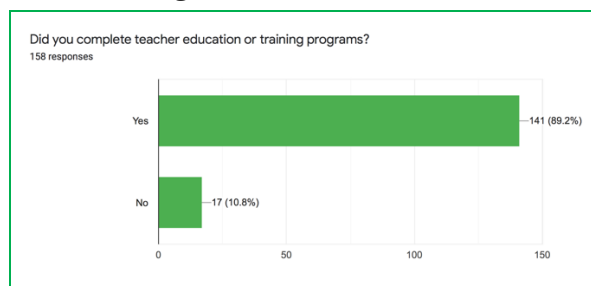

Regarding the development of creativity among young foreign language learners, 52.5% of the subjects agree that it is the language teachers' responsibility for contributing to young learners' creativity and 43.2% of them firmly agree with this statement.
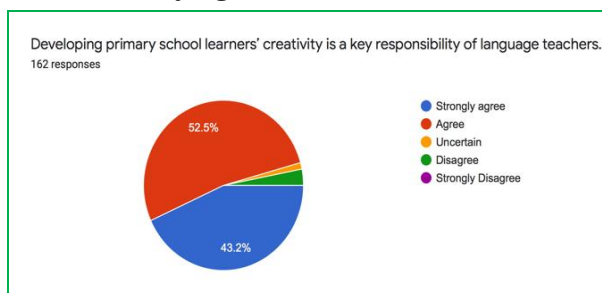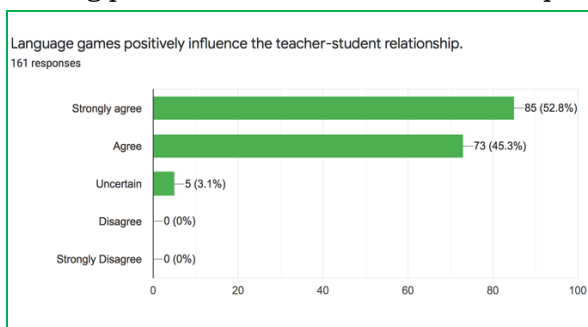
Based on the results, 54.3% of the participants agree that language teachers should use various language games in order to assess the primary school learners' communicative skills. Additionally, 39.5% of them firmly agree that teachers should evaluate communicative skills through the use of language games.

Teachers should assess the primary school learners' communicative skills through various language games.
162 responses

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Uncertain
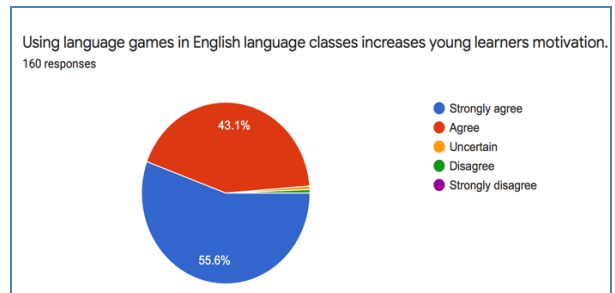- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

54.3%
39.5%

According to the survey results, 6.9% of the respondents does not utilize language games to teach new vocabulary and grammar. Unlike this, 93.1% of the participants teach new vocabulary and grammar to primary school learners with language games.

I teach new vocabulary and grammar to primary school learners through the use of language games.
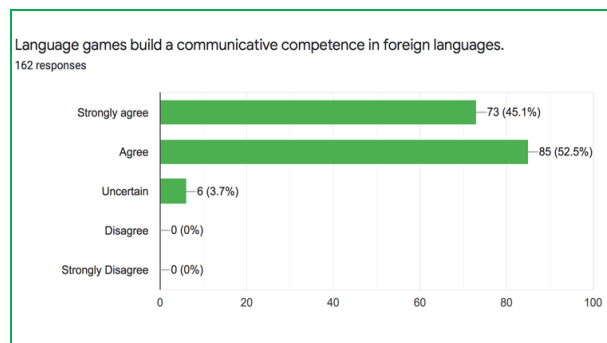160 responses

- Yes
- No

93.1%
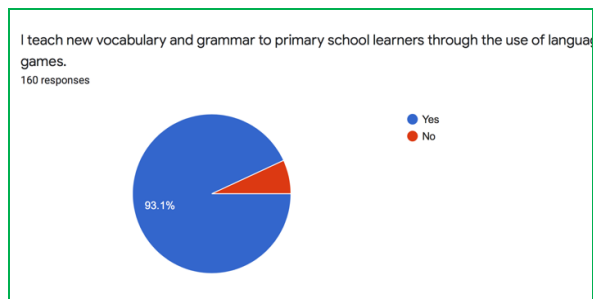
Language games also affect the teacher-student relationship and 52.8% of the participants strongly agree that language games create positive relationship between teachers and students. Less than 50% of the teachers agree with the statement shown in the questionnaire and only 3.1% of them are uncertain about the effects of language games in creating positive teacher-student relationship.

Language games positively influence the teacher-student relationship.
161 responses

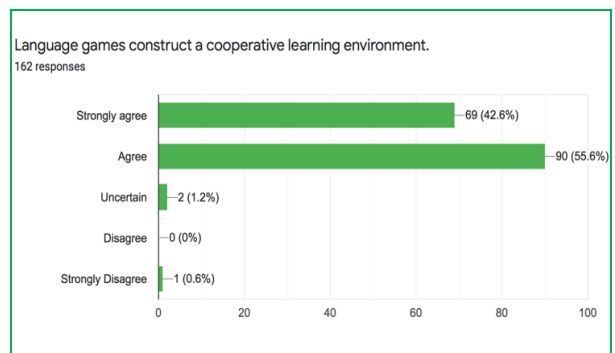|	
Strongly agree	85 (52.8%)
Agree	73 (45.3%)
Uncertain	5 (3.1%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

0   20   40   60   80   100

Relating to the correlation between the use of language games and the increase in motivation, 50% of the teachers strongly agree that language games play an important role in the increase of young learners' motivation. Moreover, 43.1% of them agree that there is a positive correlation between the use of language games and the improvement of motivation.

Using language games in English language classes increases young learners motivation.
160 responses

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Uncertain
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

43.1%
55.6%

Language games also enhance a communicative competence in foreign languages and half of the teachers participated in this research (52.5%) agree and 45.1% of them strongly agree with this statement.

Language games build a communicative competence in foreign languages.
162 responses

Strongly agree	73 (45.1%)
Agree	85 (52.5%)
Uncertain	6 (3.7%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

0   20   40   60   80   100

The following question item in the questionnaire is whether language games construct a cooperative learning environment. Just over half of the subjects agree that language games construct a cooperative learning environment, while the number of the respondents who strongly agree with this opinion is 42.6%. Only 1 respondent strongly disagrees with the statement given in the questionnaire.

Language games construct a cooperative learning environment.
162 responses

Strongly agree	69 (42.6%)
Agree	90 (55.6%)
Uncertain	2 (1.2%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	1 (0.6%)

0   20   40   60   80   100

Conclusion. From the results of the survey, it is obvious that language games boost young learners' perception of the vocabulary and grammar. The majority of the respondents who participated in this online survey consider that language games is the effective way to facilitate the learning process for young learners. In the process of foreign language acquisition, the utilization of language games also increases young learners' motivation, as well as contributes to the teacher-student relationships.

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ВИКЛАДАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ УЧНЯМ ПОЧАТКОВИХ КЛАСІВ

Узагальнюється досвід вдалого застосування інновацій у вигляді ігор у навчанні англійській мові як іноземній в школах Азербайджану. Зазначається, що розвиток педагогічного інструментарію обумовив осучаснення процесу навчання з використанням нових педагогічних методів, а також посилення мотивації учнів початкової школи до вивчення англійської мови.

Акцентовано увагу на ролі мовних ігор, які, зокрема, розглядаються як ефективні інструменти в мовному курсі початкової школи.

Обґрунтовується застосування кількісного методу дослідження, заснованого на анкетному опитуванні для оцінювання впливу мовних ігор на результати навчання англійської мови, включаючи застосування засобів Google Forms.

Вибірка охоплювала (162 особи) викладачів іноземної мови, які працюють в різних школах Азербайджану і виявили бажання залучитися опитування.

Питання, що виносилися для оцінки учасниками опитування, охоплювали різні аспекти використання мовних ігор на уроках англійської мови.

Засновуючись на досвіді педагогічної діяльності, визначено залежні і незалежні дидактичні сутності, серед яких позиціоновано мовні ігри (як незалежні сутності), мотивацію учнів початкових класів та комунікативний підхід (як залежні сутності).

У сукупності цим визначається потенційний внесок описаної роботи в педагогічне забезпечення процесу навчання англійської мови як іноземної.

Ключові слова*: інновації; методи навчання; мовні ігри; молодші учні; мотивація; комунікативні навички.*