

## THE USE OF GAMES IN IMPROVING LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION

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### **Abstract**

*This article provides information on the use of different educational games in developing the pronunciation skills of foreign language learners. Including pronunciation lessons, the importance of games is also discussed.*

### **Key words**

*games, pronunciation, pair work, group work, phonetics, EFL, ESL, speaking, types of games, vocabulary.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Lack of inspiration and motivation, using traditional methods of learning and teaching, being discouraged by their teachers and instructors, and having a fear of not learning English easily are some of the fundamental difficulties in learning to speak English correctly and fluently.<sup>30</sup> Due to not having enough self-confidence, learners - especially young ones - face more problems in this area. To overcome this trouble, some teachers believe that games, specifically integrating ones into the teaching process, could increase students' desire and willingness to learn more and communicate in classrooms in all levels and from different interests. As a matter of fact, learners want active, fun, and interesting enough activities to get motivated to learn more.

### **MAIN PART**

Most people would say that English is not a "phonetic" language because it is not pronounced the way it is spelled. However, studies have shown that over 80% of English words do follow a regular spelling pattern. Unfortunately, approximately 500 of the most common English words e.g. said, are spelled irregularly. English spelling is not as irregular as it is often portrayed

Many letters, particularly vowels, make more than one sound. Because of these discrepancies between the spelling and pronunciation of some English words, it is better, if possible, to introduce words to students orally before they see the written form. The teaching of common spelling patterns will help students pronounce unfamiliar words. The teaching of spelling and pronunciation should be closely linked to help students in mastering English pronunciation.

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<sup>30</sup> Abbott G., D. Mc Keating, J. Greenwood, and P. Wingard. The teaching of English as an international language. A practical guide. London.1981. 321 p

Traditionally, teachers approached the teaching of pronunciation by gradually introducing the 44 phonemes (sounds) that make up the English language. This is known as the bottom-up approach. Current methodology emphasizes using both the bottom-up and top-down approaches with the latter emphasizing examination of the entire piece of language including stress, intonation and sounds. Top-down and bottom up methods should be used in combination.

Consider the pronunciation target. How good do you want the students' pronunciation to be? They should be able to comprehend what people are saying to them in English. When they speak, the listeners should be able to understand them. Don't aim for perfection; it is an unrealistic expectation.

There are advantages and disadvantages in teaching the students phonetic symbols. Some teachers say that learning these symbols puts an additional burden on the students. However, many people think that these symbols are easily memorized (and the students only need to recognize the symbols rather than producing them). Once that has been accomplished, it makes the learning of pronunciation much easier. Students can look up new words in a dictionary and not only find out their meaning, but also discover how to pronounce them. Teachers can use the symbols to show the link between letters and sounds.

Enjoyment of games is not restricted age. Some individuals, regardless of to age, may be less fond of games than others. But so much depends on the appropriateness of the games and the role of the player.

It is generally accepted that young learners and adults are very willing to play games. This partially depends on the learners' socio-cultural background.

Young teenagers tend to be more self-conscious and one must take into account their reticence when selecting games for them. Games which can be played in pairs or groups may be particularly useful in this case. It is clear to all observers of classroom practice that the teacher's own belief in the usefulness and appropriateness of a game affects the learner's response.

Teenage learners might be reluctant to play games. Many people are so anxious to learn English in order to pass examinations or to improve their employment prospects that they look on games as unnecessary. If you have such committed learners, you must clearly respect their point of view and be able to justify the use of each game in terms of the density and meaningfulness of practice it provides.

It is important to note that most advanced and dedicated students can enjoy and value games if the content and language used are relevant to them.

When teaching on the phoneme level, we take noises and make them significant. When we work on pronunciation at the level of conversational dialogue, a new set of barriers appears.

Anxiety is a common enough symptom among EFL students. Fear of failure makes them stiff and nervous, and this is often readily apparent in their demeanor. Repetitive verbal games such as Jazz Chants, handclap rhymes and other structured activities can relieve much of this pressure and allow the students to concentrate on the pronunciation and intonation Classroom rituals, like learning a short greeting to use at the beginning of each class will help boost self-confidence.

Learned helplessness is a less easily spotted hindrance. This refers to our psychological tendency to 'give up' after a few failed attempts, especially if there is negative feedback from the teacher or classmates. The solution is simple - keep it positive! Praise each advancement, no matter how small, tape the students' progress so he/she can hear their improvement on a regular basis, and don't forget to award the slow learners as much recognition as the rapid ones!

Cultural identity is the last and perhaps the most important question to be dealt with. ESL and EFL students who are learning English merely for business often do not intend to assimilate, and will not wish to completely give up their accent as it sends a clear message about their roots and history.

The main objective here is not to attain some hypothetical standard of English pronunciation, but to merely ensure that all students can be readily understood. Any 'foreign' accent, in the end, will probably not be any more distracting than ones of native English speakers from varying parts of the world.

Games can be useful here as well, to break the ice and lessen tension about accents. Impersonations are a wonderful way to help students improve their pronunciation, and have a fun as well. Many famous personalities can be used as models and the students will have a terrific time guessing who they are. Often the students will find that their pronunciation will markedly improve as they mimic the speech patterns of their favorite actors and celebrities. They can even imitate the teacher for an added note of hilarity!

Songs as well as games also play a strong role in developing the pupils' speaking skills. Speaking is the productive skill in the oral mode. It is more complicated than it seems and involves more than just pronouncing words and sentences. The aims of beginners course in listening and speaking, according to Nation and Newton are the following:

- To help the learners to be able to cope with meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output as early as possible.
- To motivate the learners in their language study by getting them to engage in successful speaking and listening.

- To make the early learning as important as possible to their use needs.

As Millington stated, children are, most of the time, keen to learn how to produce new sounds and this can involve a large amount of practice. Teachers can use minimal-pair drills, but those kinds of activities will not be interesting for children. On the other hand, songs allow pupils to practice and experience new sounds without creating a sense of boredom. Songs have a natural rhythm with a periodic beat that is like the stress patterns of spoken English. Those patterns make certain songs useful and effective for practicing stress and rhythm.

Teaching speaking is hard work, especially in teenagers' class. The personalities of students play a large role in determining how quickly and correctly they will accomplish the goal. Teenagers often do not comfortable using English in the classroom, because they feel self-conscious doing so. Teenagers are very sensitive. One stop English said that they feel silly speaking a language in which they know they are making mistake, speaking English is difficult, it is not fun. Nevertheless, learning language should be enjoyable. Every opportunity for speaking in the classroom should be taken, it is by trying to communicate that students realize their need for language and by speaking they increase their fluency and opportunity. One of the ways to accomplish the goal is by using games. Gower said that Games are particularly useful with younger learners but are generally popular with students of all ages, especially if they appreciate how they can help them improve their English. According to Grin, games claims to be fun and natural. He said that games create situations in which learners are not aware anymore that they are still doing hard work, especially learning. They are involved in games and are trying to reach its goal. When designing task for speaking; one important consideration is the language proficiency level of the students. It is good to give the students task at times that challenge them. Angkana Deesri states that competition in games can stimulate and encourage students to participate in the activity since naturally they want to beat the other teams.

Games are including in creative or freer communication. Some games rather than being amusing, encourage students to use their knowledge of the world around them rather than linguistic knowledge, which brings the world into our classroom. The description is based on Gower says:

"The students are given the opportunity to experiments, to see how far they can communicate in situations where all the choices of language used are made by the people speaking; to practice the fluent use f language they know. In general these activities both increase the students' motivation, since the students talk for themselves, and help bridge the gap between rather artificial world of the classroom, with its controlled language practice, and the real world outside".

## CONCLUSION

One of ways to practice speaking in class is using pair work task and group work activities. Related to games, they are included in group activities. Cross said that simple guessing games can be played in group. He also said that easy ones to use are who I am thinking of? What's my profession? And Guess what I did?

We know that each game suggest which form of class organization is appropriate. Grouping pair and group work are very important if each learner is to have sufficient oral practice in the use of the language. Wright said the there are many ways to play games, namely:

**Pair work:** This is fast and easy to organize; it provides opportunities for intensive listening and speaking practice. Pair work is better than group work if there are discipline problems. Indeed, for all the reasons we often prefer to organize games in pair or general class work.

**Group work:** Some games require four or six players, in these cases group work is essential. Membership of groups should be constant for the sake of goodwill and efficiency. Many teachers consider it advisable to have a group leader. However, there is much to be said for encouraging a reticent learner by giving the responsibility to him or her. The leader's role is to ensure that game or activity is properly organized and to act intermediate between learners and teachers.

All of these ideas can be expanded on and modified to fit the needs of your particular class. Teaching pronunciation to EFL students is very necessary, but it doesn't have to be nerve-wracking. Just work on it a little during each class, and see your students' abilities grow!

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