

Games for English Language Teaching: Selected Cases*

เกมสำหรับการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ: กรณีตัวอย่าง

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore classroom activity-based games used in English language teaching and learning in Thailand in the period from 2007 to 2014, focusing on game procedures. Three English language teaching (ELT) games were selected from ThaiLIS (Thai Library Integrated System) by using the keyword: game. Of the 1,176 positive results, 32 were ELT games. These 32 games were analyzed and synthesized in terms of components of game-based learning, game design, and game procedures. The results showed that most games fell under the framework of teaching English for communication. The process for using games includes warm-up, presentation, practice, production, and wrap-up. The results of using these 32 games reveal that students had higher scores after utilizing games during learning, and also that students showed a positive attitude toward learning with games.

Keywords: ThaiLIS (Thai Library Integrated System); English language teaching and learning; classroom activity-based games

บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิชาการฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาวิเคราะห์กระบวนการการใช้เกมสำหรับมืออาชีวะ (classroom activity-based games) ในการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของประเทศไทยในช่วง 7 ปีที่ผ่านมา ตั้งแต่ พ.ศ. 2550-2557 เกมส์ทั้ง 3 เกมส์นั้นถูกเลือกมาจากระบบฐานข้อมูลโครงการเครือข่ายห้องสมุดในประเทศไทย (ThaiLIS) ซึ่งผลปรากฏว่ามีการใช้เกมส์ถึง 1,176 เกมส์และจำนวน 32 เกมส์เป็นเกมส์เพื่อการพัฒนาการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ ดังนั้นเกมส์ทั้ง 32 เกมส์จึงถูกศึกษาวิเคราะห์เพื่อหากระบวนการในการผลิตเกมส์ การออกแบบเกมส์ กระบวนการในการเล่นเกมส์ ซึ่งผลการศึกษาพบว่าเกมส์ส่วนใหญ่ถูกออกแบบตามกรอบแนวทางในการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสาร กระบวนการในการเล่นเกมส์เริ่มจากการเตรียมพร้อม ผู้เรียน การนำเสนอ การฝึกฝน เข้าสู่การใช้จริง และการสรุปเป็นขั้นตอนสุดท้าย ซึ่งผลของการใช้เกมส์ประกอบในการเรียนการสอนนั้นสามารถทำให้ผู้เรียนมีผลลัพธ์ที่ทางการเรียนที่สูงขึ้น รวมถึงทัศนคติที่ดีของผู้เรียนต่อการเล่นเกมส์ประกอบการเรียนการสอน

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1. Introduction

English learning and teaching are fun, enjoyable, and successful when games or simulations are used inside or outside the classroom (Koterwas, 2014; Macedonia, 2005; Reese & Wells, 2007; Suthothon & Inthanak, 2010). This is because of the pleasures games offer: fantasy, narrative, challenge, discovery, anticipation, possibility, purification, surprise, thrill, pride, and triumph (Schaller, 1997). The benefits of games is summarized below.

Learning and teaching via games: Language games can be grouped into linguistic games and communicative games (Hadfield, 1999). The former focus on form of language because learners need to use it accurately in language use; whereas, the latter focus on communication which both senders and receivers need to understand the messages, then both can exchange of information and ideas successfully (Gardner, 1987). Examples of language games are (a) sorting, ordering, or arranging games, (b) information gap games, (c) guessing games, (d) search games, (e) matching games, (f) labelling games, (g) exchanging games, and (h) role plays. To use these games or simulations for enhancing language learning, teachers need to realize the objectives of using games or simulations; for example, to create a learning environment for students and to provide an opportunity for practicing real communication through games. Game objectives and learning objectives need to be explained explicitly before playing the games (Crookall, 2014). Warm-up activities or presentation, practicing, and debriefing or reflection follow. Language teachers use classroom activity-based games in their classroom more than computer games, so only classroom activity-based games are focused on in this paper (ThaiLIS). The objectives of this paper follow.

Benefits of games: *First*, students use and practice their communication skills while playing games and taking part in simulations in their English class because they have to use the four skills to interact and exchange information in order to understand what they are trying to communicate (Suthothon & Inthanak, 2010). For instance, role plays provide opportunities for students to construct a conversation. As a result, their language skills developed (Macedonia, 2005). *Second*, games or simulations motivate students to learn because they have fun while they are learning together through playing games or taking part in simulations (Schaller, 1997; Uthai, Yumchuti & Eakpramitsil, 2012; Coupathanaroj, 2012). Consequently, students play games for a much longer period of time than when studying with the textbooks (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). This is because they are motivated by intrinsic motivators: challenge, curiosity, control, and fantasy (Malone & Lepper, 1987). *Third*, students become familiar with the culture of the target language by means of games or simulations which they play (Neville, Shelton, & McInnis, 2009). *DrumMania*, *Outrunner Special*, *Gravity's Ragnarok Online* from Korea, and *Second Life* are examples. Playing games while learning will immerse students with the

material so students learn more effectively and encourage them to learn from their mistakes (*Starting Point*, 2014). To conclude, games or simulations facilitate language learning.

Objectives: The purpose of this paper is to explore classroom activity-based games used in English language teaching and learning in Thailand in the period from 2007 to 2014, focusing on game procedures. The reason to focus on classroom activity-based games is that English teachers use more classroom activity-based games than computer games in their classroom (ThaiLIS).

The purpose of learning through games is to make the classroom learning experience more enjoyable and more meaningful. Learners learn and have fun at the same time. Therefore, teachers who want to use learning games in their class should think of the components of game-based learning.

2. Design and components of game-based learning

Learners undergo a transformational experience when they play educational games (Bergeron, Dennstedt, Goldin, & Lim, 2011). “In transformational play, students become immersed in activities that engage them intellectually and push back on their thinking and actions” (Barab, Gresalfi, & Arici, 2009, p.77). Thus, teachers need to design their games carefully in order to meet the goals and objectives of learning by considering the components of game-based learning. Because of the limited scope of this paper, only two designs—traditional games and scenario-based serious games—are summarized in order to provide background knowledge for developing criteria for selecting classroom activity-based games.

2.1 Traditional game design: When teachers design their games, they should include the following six main components: game-players, goals, tools, rules, instructions, and skills. Teachers should specify the *game-players* first, and include related information such as age, level of education, profession, and gender. Players may take part as single-players or multiple players. Next, teachers set *objectives for the games and for learning*; the objectives should be behavioral. Then teachers set *goals for the games* such as money, scores, or gold; these items serve as a reward for achieving the goals of the games. Thus, goals shape the actions of the players. Goals may produce competition (winners or losers) or noncompetition (cooperative games). An example of the latter is role-playing games; these games focus on completing a particular mission. *Tools, devices, or materials* use for each game are essential components for playing games, though some games, such as hide-and-seek, do not need to use any special tools. Tools, devices, or materials may include miniatures, balls, cards, a board and pieces, computers, smartphones, or tablets. *Rules or conditions* are what players have to follow when they play games. Players’ experiences or actions are shaped and structured by

rules (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006). Players fail in their games because they cannot conform to rules, and then they need to return to the beginning or play the game again. The *instructions for playing games* must be clear, simple, and explicit, so players understand and are able to play games correctly. Finally, *skills, abilities, or outcomes* for the players are the results of playing games. Players may gain physical skills and/or mental skills after playing games.

2.2 Scenario-based serious games: Freeman (2009) analyzed 50 publications on serious games and the learning design for these games and found seven interconnected design components for designing effective scenario-based serious games: narrative, motivation, rules, dynamics, mechanics, action, and assessment. *Narrative* refers to a story which is well-sequenced chronologically; this helps learners to engage in learning. *Motivation* results in the actions of learners, and motivation is provided by using authentic materials or situations, “The more authentic the motivation, the more meaningful the learner’s actions” (Freeman, 2009, p. 5). Rules refer to what players can or cannot do in games and what conditions players must complete to achieve the goals. Dynamics or gameplays help learners to gain experience and then they increase their skills and become more expert. Gameplays “are more interesting and engaging when the actions required are achievable while also challenging” (Freeman, 2009, p. 6). *Mechanics* refers to “the external and internal controls, tools and methods used to interact with the game world” (Freeman, 2009, p. 6); these mechanics must be simple in order to make the games less confusing for the players. *Action* must be included, focused on the learning objectives, and relevant to future action required in a real context. Finally, *assessment* is essential for serious games “to ensure learning objectives are met” (Freeman, 2009, p. 6). Assessment must be meaningful and may be provided immediately (formative) or delayed (summative). To conclude, these seven components are crucial for creating serious learning games.

We blended two types of components of game-based learning—traditional game design and scenario-based serious games—in this study in order to provide criteria for selecting games for class. These criteria include game-players; goals for games; objectives for games; objectives for learning; tools, devices, or materials; rules; roles; instructions; narrative; motivation; dynamics; mechanics; procedures; actions; skills, abilities, or outcomes; debriefing; and assessment/feedback. Finally, a game analysis form was constructed for recording data (see Appendix A).

To sum up, components of game-based learning will reflect whether the goals and objectives of learning are met. Teachers have to include these components in their design and make use of them in order to make their games more attractive, effective, and fun.

3. Language Games in Thailand

This paper explored classroom activity-based games used in English language teaching and learning in Thailand in the period from 2007 to 2014, focusing on game procedures. To meet the objectives of this paper, the source of the data is described below. All ELT games were analyzed by using the components of game-based learning, and then the game design and procedures were synthesized.

3.1 Source of data

The source of the data is ThaiLIS (Thai Library Integrated System), a Thai academic database, developed by the Office of the Higher Education Commission, Ministry of Education, Thailand. There are 58,392 documents based on August 9, 2007, including dissertations by Ph.D. students, theses by master's degree students, research papers, and academic papers from 86 institutions. One keyword, "game", was used to search on April 8, 2014. The search yielded 1,176 results. Scanning for "English language teaching and learning" and "classroom activity-based game" produced only 32 results, shown as follows. All games were designed and conducted by master's degree candidates (32 cases) and were used at the primary or secondary level. Twelve games were used for teaching English vocabulary, two games were used for teaching English grammar, and eighteen games were used for teaching English language skills. Most studies showed that games fell under the framework of teaching English for communication. Then these games were analyzed in terms of the components of game-based learning. Finally, three games were selected because they included most components of game-based learning (see Appendices B, C, and D).

Content analysis was used to analyse the data. The researchers collected data and analyzed items individually and independently. First, the researchers downloaded all 32 theses. The researchers scanned these theses to find data for the first item of the criteria, which was "Game-players". The researchers read each thesis thoroughly before recording the data obtained on the Game Analysis Form. This first step was done for all 32 theses. After we finished analyzing the first item, we continued on to the second item, which was "Goals for the games" and did the same as for the first item. This process was carried out until we completed all 17 items. Then the raters compared results with each other and found that the results were the same because data from this source and the recording tool were clear. (See results in the table below)

Table Components for game-based learning: Selected cases

Components for game-based learning	Game 1	Game 2	Game 3
1. Game-players	✓	✓	✓
2. Goals for games	✓	✓	✓
3. Objectives for games	✓	✓	✓
4. Objectives for learning	✓	✓	✓
5. Tools, devices, or materials	✓	✓	✓
6. Rules	✓	✓	✓
7. Roles	✓	-	✓
8. Instructions	✓	✓	✓
9. Narrative	-	-	-
10. Motivation	✓	✓	✓
11. Dynamics	-	-	-
12. Mechanics	-	-	-
13. Procedures	✓	✓	✓
14. Action	✓	-	✓
15. Skills, abilities, or outcomes	✓	✓	✓
16. Debriefing	✓	-	✓
17. Assessment/feedback	✓	✓	✓

Next, the three games which were suitable for university students were selected and adapted and improved for university students after receiving comments and suggestions from gaming scholars at the ISAGA2014 Conference. The next section will summarize game design and the procedures carried out by Thai teachers.

3.2 Game Design

Most research studies have been conducted in order to investigate the effectiveness of utilizing games in the English language classroom and to examine the improvement in English skills in the students learning through games. To reach the objectives of the study, the teachers studied ideas and principles involved in using games in second language teaching and analyzed the English syllabus in terms of its goals, objectives, content, expected outcomes, as well as the textbooks used. Then the teachers chose some lessons as target lessons. Subsequently, the teachers designed lesson plans. Lesson plans included rationale, objectives, content, learning activities, learning materials, and evaluation procedures.

Lesson plans were developed based on the framework for foreign language learning, based on the Basic Education Curriculum 2001 and 2008 of Thailand (Office of Academic and Educational Standards, 2009). The following studies took this framework into account in creating the lesson plans and combined games used as main activities (Suksomboon, 2007; Srimahongnam, 2007; Supakaew, 2007; Ya-Cham, 2007; Boonpa, 2007; Chanchula, 2008; Phinit, 2009; Kanlayason, 2010; Merat, 2013). The main contents of the framework include four strands as follows: (1) language for communication, (2) language and culture, (3) language and its relationship with other learning areas, and (4) language and its relationship with the wider community and the world. Most research studies produced games and blended them into the lesson plans for use as tools to enhance the students' English skills. It is clear that when using games in the classroom, it is important to integrate them into the regular syllabus and curriculum, as stated by Deesri (2002).

3.3 Game Procedures

The learning activities involving games were designed by teaching or practicing the content of the English textbook which indicated in the lesson plan. Procedures included five steps: warm-up, presentation, practice, production, and wrap-up (Suksomboon, 2007; Srimahongnam, 2007; Supakaew, 2007; Ya-Cham, 2007; Boonpa, 2007; Chanchula, 2008; Phinit, 2009; Kanlayason, 2010; Merat, 2013).

- a) **At the warm-up stage**, the teacher explained the objectives of the lessons, and also the teacher discussed the topic of the lesson with the students. One of the lessons found in the research studies showed that a video clip was used as a warm-up activity to motivate the students instead of having the teacher just begin teaching the content (Boonpa, 2007). Another lesson plan used a pre-test as a warm-up activity (Kanlayason, 2010).
- b) **The presentation, practice, and production steps** can be considered as the teaching process. The teacher presents the content of the lesson. For example, the teacher shows some picture cards illustrating new vocabulary words and tells the learners how each word is pronounced. Sometimes, tape- or CD-recordings of English native speaker voices were used. Then the students were asked to repeat. The students practiced the new words by taking part in many activities, such as doing a pair-work activity, doing a role-play activity, doing exercises individually, and playing games. Some of the research studies, such as those by Chanchula (2008) and Boonpa (2007), showed that games were played at the practice stage, but other research studies required the students to play games at the production stage (Srimahongnam, 2007; Kanlayason, 2010).

c) The **wrap-up stage** is likely to consist of a question and answer session or a quiz session. In some cases, the students were asked to answer questions about the items they had just learned. For example, other teachers randomly selected some of the students to answer questions, or the teacher gave learners a learning checklist in order that the students evaluate what they had achieved after finishing the lesson. In addition, the teachers and the students sometimes shared ideas about the topic, and also the students got a chance to ask the teacher to clarify some difficult issues arising out of the lesson. Post-tests were sometimes used at this stage to evaluate the students' learning outcome and the improvement in their English skills.

It seems that the wrap-up step corresponds to the notion of "debriefing" as Crookall (2011) suggest. Crookall (2011, p. 907) pointed out that "debriefing is the processing of the game experience to turn it into learning". Debriefing is essential for learning through games. It allows people who participated in the same experience to share their experiences. "Some learning occurs while a game is being played, but deeper lessons are drawn and drawn out in a debriefing session" (Crookall, 2011, p. 908).

In addition, most of research indicates that the students received higher scores after learning through games, and also that students showed a positive attitude toward learning through games.

4. Conclusion

It can be concluded that few studies have been conducted about the use of English language teaching and learning through games and that most of those that have been done were done at the primary level or secondary level. Thai teachers prefer classroom activity-based games to computer games. They design their games based on the syllabus and use a lesson plan as a means of teaching their students. Their lesson plans included the essential parts of learning and teaching, which are rationale, objectives, content, learning activities, learning materials, and evaluation procedures. Finally, teachers engaged students in learning the target language through playing games by following this procedure: warm-up, presentation, practice, production, and wrap-up. To improve language games in Thailand, the components of game-based learning should also be taken into account in order that game design and its implementation can both serve classroom purposes and increase students' language proficiency at the same time. Certainly, classroom pedagogy will also improve.

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APPENDIX A

Game Analysis Form

Components of game-based learning	Game 1	Game 2	Game 3	Game 18
1. Game-players					
2. Goals for games					
3. Objectives for games					
4. Objectives for learning					
5. Tools, devices, or materials					
6. Rules					
7. Roles					
8. Instructions					
9. Narrative					
10. Motivation					
11. Dynamics					
12. Mechanics					
13. Procedures					
14. Action					
15. Skills, abilities, or outcomes					
16. Debriefing					
17. Assessment/ feedback					

APPENDIX B

Running Talking Game

Objectives: To improve speaking and listening skills

Preparation: The content corresponding to the objectives focuses on the present simple tense and routine daily activities.

Materials: Vocabulary cards illustrating routine daily activities

Time: 30 minutes (depending on how large the class is)

Procedures: 1. The teacher prepares 2 sets of vocabulary cards illustrating routine daily activities.

2. The teacher divides the students into 2 teams of equal size and has them stand in rows.

3. A set of vocabulary cards for routine daily routine activities is placed on the table in front of each team. The cards should be shuffled and the table should be three paces from the first person in the line.

4. The teacher gives a signal to start. The first person in team A runs to the table to pick up one of the cards and shows it to the team. Then he/she has to create a full sentence about any routine daily activity shown on the card and say the sentence quickly. The teacher checks whether the sentence is correct or not. After that, the student moves to the end of the line. Then team B can start.

5. The game continues until the last person on each team finishes.

6. Anyone of the team who says a correct sentence scores one point for the team. At the end, the total score for each team is calculated. Whichever team gets the highest score will be the winner.

Evaluation: The sentences that the players said are assessed.

(source: Boonpa, Y. (2007). *The development of speaking skill by using game for communication of Grade 5 students. Unpublished master's thesis. Mahasarakham University.*)

APPENDIX C

What is your hobby? Board game

Objectives: 1. To practice pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary about hobbies

2. To practice questions and answers about hobbies

3. To take part in collaborative learning

Preparation: The content corresponding to the objectives involves hobbies. The teacher makes a set of board games with pictures of hobbies. Red cards and blue cards are prepared. The teacher randomly draws one or more pictures of smiling faces on the blue cards, and randomly draws one or more pictures of frowning faces on the red cards.

Materials: 1. Board games with pictures illustrating hobbies

2. Dice and chips. Alternatively, coins can be used.

3. Red cards and blue cards

All of these materials are to be provided for each group of 2 students. If there are 30 students in the class, the teacher needs to prepare 15 sets.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Procedures: 1. Divide the students into pairs. One set of materials is given to each pair of students.

2. Student A rolls a die on the board. Then the student moves his/her chip on the board. If the lands on a square with a picture illustrating a hobby, student B has to ask

“What is your hobby?” and student A answers “My hobby is ...” Student A also needs to spell the word. If the chip lands on a plain box, it is student B’s turn to play.

3. A student who answers a question correctly will take one blue card from the stack of blue cards, and then receives a score equal to the number of smiling faces on the card. If the answer is incorrect, a red card will be drawn from the stack of red cards. And then the student receives a (negative) score as equal to the number of frowning faces.

4. The student who collects the highest number of smiling faces is the winner.

Evaluation: The behaviours performance worksheet is used.

(source: Chanchula, S. (2008). *An achievement of using board game to enhance vocabulary spelling of Grad4 students. Unpublished master's thesis. Mahasarakham University.*)

APPENDIX D

Knowing our local products: I.Q.Test & Double or Quit Games

Objectives: To improve speaking and listening skills

Preparation: *Vocabulary focus:* Local products vocabulary (preserved food, dried shrimp, fermented fish, salted fish, smoked fish, pickled crab, Kao kaeb, Kao pun puk, Mhee pun, wickerwork, bamboo fish-trap, kinds of eel, kinds of bamboo fishing trap, seine, handicraft, woven cloth, organic fertilizer, bean sprout, fried bean curd, pork cracking, ordinary, etc.)

Functional focus: asking for and giving information

Materials: 1. Vocabulary cards illustrating local products

2. Tape or CD of vocabulary regarding local products and tape of CD player

3. Worksheet with pictures of local products

4. A set of 4 answer cards including a) It’s wickerwork, b) It’s a local food, c) It’s preserved food, and d) It’s a handicraft

Time: 30 - 45 minutes

Procedures: 1. The teacher starts the warm-up activity by writing some words naming products, such as canned food, silk cloth, and car, and writing some words for non-products, such as animals, trees, and people on the board and has the students discuss what a product is.

2. The students listen to the tape or CD recording of local product vocabulary and put a tick (✓) in front of each local product they hear on an answer sheet provided by the teacher. Then the students practice pronouncing by repeating after the CD.

3. The teacher divides the students into groups of 4-5 members.

4. The groups listen twice to the questions from the teacher and then must show the answer card saying what kind of product they have heard within 20 seconds. For example, for “What’s Mhee pun”; the answer is “It’s a local product”.

5. Next, the groups will play the double or quit game. There are 16 questions, but each group will have the chance to answer only 2 questions. The teacher will randomly select which group will answer each question.

6. If the answer is true but incorrect, the teacher will tell students to correct it. They will get 2 points for each correct answer and a 5-point bonus for correcting it. After answering a question, the group will have the chance to choose whether they will try to double their score or quit.

Roles: The students have to study the activity cards provided carefully and follow the instructions

Evaluation: A post-test is used.

(source: Suksomboon, W. (2007). *A construction of an English instructional package using language games on “Local products in My Sub-district” for Mattayomsuksa 4 students of Danmaekummun Phittayakom School. Unpublished master’s thesis. Uttaradit Rajabhat University.*)