

DIDACTIC GAMES AS A TOOL FOR FORMING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN YOUNG ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Arzykan Shamuratova Nurkasymovna

Senior Teacher, Institute of Phylology and Intercultural communications,
Interfaculty Department of Foreign Languages, Osh State University

Aisynai Alymbaeva Sabyrbekovna

Lecturer, Institute of Phylology and Intercultural communications,
Interfaculty Department of Foreign Languages, Osh State University

Karachach Bapy kyzy

Lecturer, Institute of Phylology and Intercultural communications,
Interfaculty Department of Foreign Languages, Osh State University

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Abstract: This study explores the role of didactic games in enhancing communicative competence among primary school students in English language classrooms. The research emphasizes the theoretical foundations of game-based learning and its integration into communicative language teaching. The findings demonstrate that the use of didactic games not only facilitates the acquisition of lexical, grammatical, and phonetic units but also motivates learners, fosters interaction, and develops critical thinking and creativity. The article argues that properly designed didactic games significantly improve students' ability to engage in intercultural communication, making them an effective methodological tool for modern primary education.

Keywords: didactic games, communicative competence, game-based learning, English language teaching, primary education, intercultural communication, teaching methodology

Introduction. Human communication begins at birth and serves as the foundation of social interaction. In today's era of globalization, the ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language has become one of the most important educational goals. However, previous research indicates that not all learners succeed in developing communicative competence. Psychological factors such as shyness, hesitation, and lack of confidence, together with limited language proficiency, often hinder students from expressing themselves freely. These challenges are of particular concern to psychologists, linguists, and educators.

The issue of communicative competence is especially relevant in primary education, where students are at the stage of developing attention, memory, imagination, and critical thinking (Passov, 1999). Studies show that young learners demonstrate strong perceptual and listening skills and are quick to grasp the subtleties of phonetics (Puchta & Williams, 2011). Therefore, the integration of game-based methods can significantly facilitate the acquisition of lexical, grammatical, and phonetic units. According to Nunan (2018) and Willis (1996), games in language learning can offer natural, meaningful communicative practice that engages students creatively and enhances their interest and imagination.

Piaget (2001) and Vygotsky (1978) highlighted that games serve as a universal element of human culture and an effective means of cognitive and social development. In the context of foreign language education, didactic games not only create motivation but also encourage active participation, problem-solving, and collaborative learning.

Despite the wide recognition of the value of games in pedagogy, there remains a lack of systematic research on how didactic games contribute specifically to the formation of communicative competence in English language teaching for primary school students in

Uzbekistan. Addressing this gap, the present study explores the theoretical foundations and practical applications of didactic games in developing communicative skills among young learners. The main objective of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of didactic games in fostering communicative competence and to identify methodological strategies for their successful integration into classroom practice.

Literature review. The concept of communicative competence has been central to language education since the works of Hymes (1972), who emphasized the social and pragmatic aspects of communication beyond grammar. Later, Canale and Swain (1980) elaborated this framework, identifying grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components. These models laid the foundation for modern communicative language teaching (CLT), which remains highly influential in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts worldwide (Nunan, 2018; Richards, 2020).

A growing body of research highlights the importance of lexical competence as the basis for communicative skills. Chomsky (2006) noted that vocabulary is a core element of linguistic competence, while contemporary studies confirm that vocabulary acquisition directly affects learners' ability to express ideas fluently and accurately (Nation, 2013). In primary education, vocabulary learning is particularly crucial, as it supports the development of speaking, listening, and reading abilities at an early age (Ergasheva, 2018).

Didactic games have long been recognized as effective pedagogical tools. Piaget (2001) and Vygotsky (1978) demonstrated that play fosters cognitive, social, and linguistic development, making it an essential component of child learning. More recent scholars argue that games promote motivation, reduce anxiety, and increase learner engagement in the classroom (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006; Hadfield, 2014).

In the field of foreign language education, Willis (1996) and Nunan (2018) showed that task-based and game-based approaches create natural opportunities for communication, where learners can experiment with language in meaningful contexts. Research on gamification and classroom games suggests that such activities can enhance vocabulary retention and foster learners' motivation, confidence, and willingness to communicate (Kapp, 2012; Lee & Hammer, 2011).

While the role of games in education is widely acknowledged, research specifically addressing their use in developing communicative competence in the context of primary school English education in Uzbekistan remains scarce. Most existing studies focus on general methodological recommendations or theoretical aspects, leaving a gap in evidence-based analysis of practical classroom applications.

Research and Methodology. This study employed a qualitative-experimental design aimed at examining the effectiveness of didactic games in developing communicative competence among primary school students. The research was carried out in several primary classrooms in Uzbekistan during the 2023–2024 academic year.

The participants were students aged 7–9 enrolled in primary school English courses. In total, 482 learners took part in the experiment. They were at the beginner level of English and represented mixed-ability classes.

Materials and Instruments. A set of didactic and role-playing games was designed and adapted for the students' age, competence, and interests. The selection of language material followed the principle of accessibility, ease of explanation, and versatility, without reliance on expensive or complex resources. The games were structured to strengthen previously introduced vocabulary and grammar, while fostering speaking and listening skills in natural communicative situations.

The games included:

Imitation games, where students’ behavior in problematic or everyday situations was simulated;

Operational games, designed to practice specific speech acts and functional language use;

Role-playing games with plots, such as *teacher–student*, *buyer–seller*, *doctor–patient*, which encouraged authentic interaction and responsibility in communication.

Procedure. The experiment was conducted over a series of lessons. At each stage, students worked individually, in pairs, and in groups, depending on the game format. The communicative situations created during the games required students to express their thoughts not only verbally but also through non-verbal means, such as gestures, intonation, and emotional expression.

A model of communicative competence formation through didactic games was developed and implemented (see **Figure 1**). The principle of learner-centeredness guided the process, ensuring that the activities addressed both the educational and developmental goals of foreign language teaching.

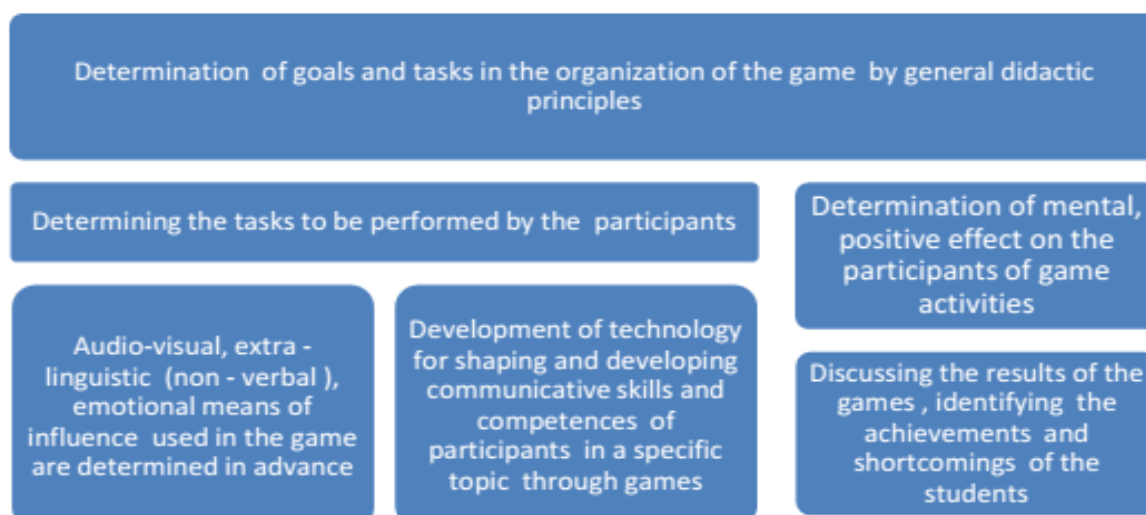


Figure 1. Model of communicative competence formation in primary school English education through didactic games.

Data Collection and Analysis. Data were collected through classroom observation, student performance tasks, and experimental testing before and after the intervention. The results demonstrated that systematic use of didactic games increased learners’ motivation, confidence, independent thinking, and ability to construct coherent speech. Moreover, experimental data confirmed that the application of game-based methods enhanced the continuity of learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Analysis and Results. Teaching language material by means of didactic game technologies ensures the activation of various intellectual and practical activities of students. This leads to positive outcomes in language education. The use of didactic games in the process of teaching grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics also changes the traditional role of the teacher in the classroom. Organizing learning through games for students of different ages has proven to be an effective method, as the improvement of modern approaches to foreign language instruction remains one of the urgent challenges in education (Rsaliev, 2023).

Firstly, the intensification of the educational process requires developing students’ interest in the studied material and finding ways to activate their knowledge and skills during the lesson. Educational games serve as an effective tool for addressing this issue. Secondly, one of the most pressing challenges in foreign language teaching is to promote oral communication, reveal the

communicative function of the language, and bring the learning process closer to real-life conditions. This increases motivation and enhances the quality of language learning. Students' involvement in oral interaction is effectively facilitated through game-based activities.

At the current stage of educational development, the primary goal of teaching a foreign language is to develop communicative competence. Stronin (1981) divides didactic games into five main categories: **phonetic, lexical, grammatical, spelling, and creative** (see Figure 2).

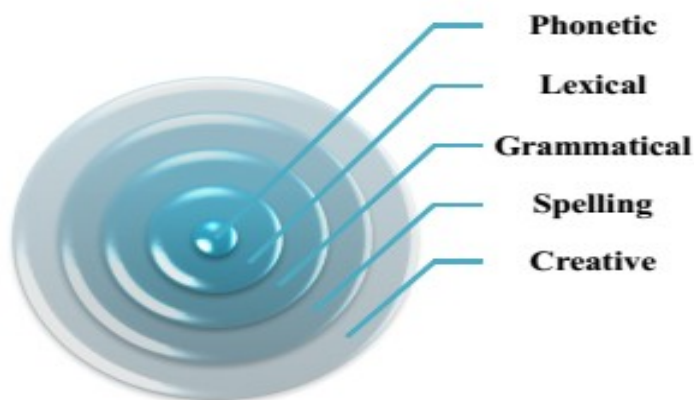


Figure 2: Types of didactic games

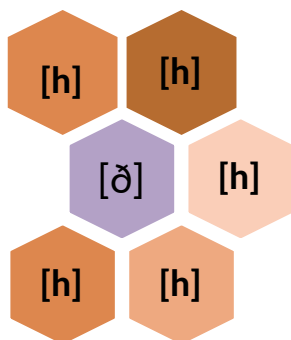
Each type of game contributes to the development of specific skills and competencies in learning a foreign language. In elementary English classes, games are used not only to practice language material and types of speech activities but also to relieve tension and monotony. Age-specific considerations must be taken into account when choosing games. For instance, in teaching English at the primary level, special attention is given to correct pronunciation of sounds. The practical purpose of games lies in the principle that with repeated practice, students will be able to automatically recognize and produce the required sounds. Properly selected and well-organized games significantly contribute to the formation and development of communicative competence, as well as to the overall personal growth of schoolchildren (Saidaliev, 2021).

Implementation of Didactic Games in Trial Lessons

In order to implement the outlined tasks, a set of **phonetic, lexical, spelling, and grammatical educational games** was introduced to students during trial lessons. These games were aimed at improving pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, spelling accuracy, and grammar usage while keeping learners engaged through play-based interaction.

Phonetic games

1. BEES



The course of the game: the teacher tells the children that one bee is English (and this can be seen from his costume), and the other is Uzbek. English bees make noise [ð], and Uzbek make [h]. The bees met on the flower and talked to each other, exchanged news. (alternatively [ð], [h]).

2. TONGUE TWISTERS

Phonetic games can be used by having a competition of who can pronounce better and faster.

Pat's black cat is in Pat's black hat.

If you, Andy, have two candies, give one candy to Sandy, Andy.

A cup of nice coffee is in a nice coffee-cup.

Geb is Bob's dog. Tob is Mob's dog.

Pat keeps two pets.

ENTER A LETTER

Purpose: to check the acquisition of spelling within the studied lexical material. The course of the game: two teams are formed. The board is divided into two parts. For each command, words are written, each of which has a missing letter. Representatives of the teams go to the board in turn, enter the missing letter and read the word. For example:

c...t, a...d, a...m, p...n, r...d, s...t, r...n, t...n, o...d, t...a, l...g, h...n, h... r, h...s, f...x, e.g, fo...d, b...d
Answers (cat, and, arm, pen, red, sit, run, ten, old, tea, leg, hen, her, his, fox, egg, food, bed).

Lexical games

1. Cube

In this game, the following words and phrases representing the action related to the theme "Family" - "My family", "My day off", "Mother", "father", "uy-home", "tree-tree", "he is standing up", "he is washing up", "he is having lunch" are written on the hexagonal cube. The teacher throws the cube and shows the students the words and phrases on the cube, the students repeat the words and phrases over and over again. As a result, students' language skills (phonetic, grammatical, lexical) were formed.

2. "CREATE A ROBOT" teaches how to describe a person's appearance. The class is divided into three teams, one of which is the police department. Three captains are selected using the count pronoun. They turn to the police with a request to find a missing friend, describe his appearance, and children draw the corresponding pictures. If the picture matches the description, the missing person is considered found. For example. I can't find my sister. He is ten years old. He is a school student. He is not tall. His hair is dark. His eyes are blue. Wearing a red hat, wearing a white hat.

Grammar games

1. "The Gate" offers revision and reinforcement of all types of quiz questions. Two strong students ("gatekeepers") stand in front of the class and join hands to form a "gate." The rest of the game participants take turns approaching the "gatekeepers" and asking them questions about a particular structure. Depending on the correctness of the question, the answer will be: "The door is open (shut)". A student who gets the question wrong can try again.

Ex. Are you going to .. (do smth)? What are you going to do in (on, at)?

2. "What is it?"

This game is played based on five definitions. The teacher describes the names of an object, flower, fruit, animal to the students. Students focus on five descriptions that are specific to the item, thing, or animal being described.

1. It is an animal.

2. *It is grey, black and white.*
3. *It lives at home.*
4. *It is small and cute.*
5. *It likes mice.*

What is it?

Answer: It is a cat.

Conclusion. The findings of this study confirm that didactic games play a significant role in the formation of communicative competence in primary school English education. The use of games allows students to employ the foreign language as a natural means of communication, driven by their intrinsic motivation to participate in playful activities. Importantly, such activities engage not only high-achieving learners but also those with limited language proficiency, as personal qualities such as creativity, leadership, and initiative can become equally important as linguistic knowledge.

The transition to modern educational technologies, including game-based methods, reflects broader changes in the development of society and the rise of the information age. Within this context, didactic games provide effective tools for activating foreign language learning, increasing learner motivation, and enhancing interaction in the classroom.

Overall, the integration of didactic games into the foreign language curriculum contributes to:

- strengthening phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and communicative skills;
- creating conditions for authentic oral interaction;
- supporting the holistic development of learners’ cognitive and social competences.

Future research could further explore the comparative effectiveness of different types of didactic games across age groups, as well as their impact on long-term retention of language material.

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