Using Communicative Language Games in Teaching and Learning English in Taiwanese Primary Schools

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Abstract

Interest in using language games as teaching and learning activities in educational contexts is on the rise. The aim of this paper is to examine the use of communicative language games for teaching and learning English in Taiwanese elementary schools. The participants were 150 teachers teaching in Taiwanese primary schools. The instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire about participants’ perspectives on the use of communicative language games in English lessons. The results of the study provided encouraging evidence to indicate that Taiwanese elementary school teachers generally appreciated the benefits and value of communicative game activities in the teaching of English language. The findings also suggested that when facing students with different backgrounds, learning styles, needs, and expectations, teachers should be aware to take learners’ individual variations into account and be more flexible in their use of communicative games in order to maximize educational effect. It is hoped that communicative language games will attract more attention and will be applied more widely in the classroom with more positive attitudes on the part of language teachers.

Keywords: Communicative language teaching, Communicative language games, Communicative competence

1. Context and Purpose

English, a global language, has become one of the dominant mediums in politics, economy, and education internationally. In Taiwan, English nowadays is the major medium to communicate with the whole world and the main language used for international trade and academic study. Accordingly, possessing basic English proficiency has become one of the essential requirements for many Taiwanese in this global village. Also, in Taiwanese society there is an obviously positive correlation that the better a person’s English ability, the greater that person’s chances for higher education, professional employment and promotion prospects. The significance of English, therefore, cannot be ignored.

However, despite years of English instruction at schools, it is found that many Taiwanese students fail to use the target language competently for genuine communication. The major reason is that English education in Taiwan puts great stress on written assessments rather than communication ability. The typical English teaching methods are form-based and text-based, and many teachers adopt Grammar Translation Method or Audiolingual Method on their teaching. English is taught by using dialogues for repetition and memorization, along with lots of systematic and intensive drills on sentence patterns and grammar rules. Grammar is regarded as the cornerstone in English instruction, whereas conversational English is hardly practiced. There is no real communication in English classes. Acquiring linguistic knowledge becomes the end instead of any ability to appropriately use the language of English. It is, therefore, often discovered that through such methods some Taiwanese students have fundamental understanding of formulaic phrases, but are unable or too shy to put them to use, not to mention the difficulties in
conversing with a fluent speaker. For those students, English language is not a practical language in which they can freely communicate with others, but merely another subject for examinations.

In addition to teaching methods, lack of sufficient exposure to the target language and motivation in using the language is also one of the leading factors affecting students' English learning. In Taiwan, Chinese or Taiwanese is the most common spoken language at work and at home. Although English is fairly important in many aspects, immersing in such a predominantly Chinese-speaking community, most students have insufficient contact with authentic English and minimal chances to use it. Students are usually exposed to English at schools only when it is taught as a subject in English classes. Even worse, some English teachers use quite a lot of Chinese in their instruction for that is more convenient for them to teach and easier for students to comprehend lesson content. Needless to say, such foreign language classroom confines its ability to develop students' communicative competence in the target language. Students often experience great difficulty in transferring what they have learned in the classroom to the outside world. Moreover, for many Taiwanese students, especially the secondary level, attending an English class usually means bringing heavy textbooks and dictionaries to an isolated, dull room full of criticism and frustration. The ultimate goal of English learning is to score high in numerous standardized tests by practicing, memorizing and repeating discrete linguistic items. Owing to the keen competition of the tests, error is prevented and accuracy is greatly expected. Some students seldom experience a sense of achievement and suffer from studying English. They, as a result, are not highly motivated to learn English, and even give it up at the very early beginning.

It seems very clear that the traditional English language teaching in Taiwan does not yield satisfactory results. Hence, effectively acquiring a language is an important issue to English instruction in Taiwan. Willis [1] (p.19) raises four optimal conditions for language acquisition: “exposure to the target language”, “opportunities for learners to use the target language for real communication”, “motivation for learners to engage in the learning process” and “instruction for drawing learners’ attention to language form”. In Taiwan, an EFL country, an English class should be one that meets these conditions. Once these four conditions naturally coincide, learners can learn a language quite successfully without too many rules explained or patterns practiced. Also, current second language teaching methods intend to develop learners' communicative competence which enables them to communicate effectively in a second language [2]. The goal of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is to engage learners in using the target language through doing creative tasks for a communicative purpose in order to qualify them as communicatively-competent people who are able to use appropriate linguistic forms in real situations to communicate meanings as spontaneously and flexibly as possible [3] [4]. The Ministry of Education, Taiwan (MOE) thus takes a favorable attitude towards CLT and has initiated a series of curricular reforms with an intention to reflect a more communicative approach to English language teaching and learning. Specifically, the Grade 1-9 National Curriculum Guidelines [5] established by the MOE has three objectives specific to English learning for elementary school pupils. They are “basic communication ability”, “interest in learning English” and “understanding of both the native culture and the culture of the target language”.

CLT aims to develop learners’ communicative competence by exposing learners to rich and comprehensible input in the target language and involving them in communicating and participating actively through using the language. The chief technique of CLT is having students use the target language to carry out creative tasks such as games, dramas, songs or role playing to attain the communicative goal of the curriculum. Furthermore, communicative activities in the form of games not solely have a lot of fun to foster learners’ interest in learning,
but also can be used to teach new items, practice language forms and revise what has been learned before to speed up learners’ pace of language development. Moreover, some language games can inspire learners’ cultural awareness which helps foreign language learning more efficiently. It is therefore that CLT, among various kinds of language teaching approaches, is able to satisfy Willis’ [1] four conditions for language acquisition (i.e., ‘exposure’, ‘use’, ‘motivation’ and ‘instruction’) and to serve as a framework to support the Grade 1-9 National Curriculum Guidelines set for Taiwanese primary school students learning English. However, because the eventual success or failure of any innovative device in the classroom hinges on its implementers, the teacher’s own belief in and awareness of usefulness and appropriateness of a particular teaching method reflects her/his classroom practice and will influence how well students learn at class [6] [7]. In order to get a clearer picture of Taiwanese primary school teachers’ views on employing communicative language games or game-like activities in English lessons, a questionnaire survey adapted from Chan [8] and Kwok [9] was carried out in the study, and seven research questions were proposed to guide this study.

1. To what extent do communicative language games motivate students to learn in English lessons?
2. How useful are communicative language games as learning activities in English lessons?
3. What are the attitudes of students and parents towards the use of communicative language games in English lessons?
4. Are there any students’ language problems which hinder the effectiveness of using communicative language games in English lessons?
5. What are the difficulties a teacher may encounter in using communicative language games in English lessons?
6. How often are communicative language games used in English lessons?
7. What kinds of communicative language games are most frequently used in English lessons?

2. Review of Literature

Nowadays, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has drawn much attention on discussions both in the literature and in classroom practice, and has become the mainstream in contemporary methodology for ESL/EFL learning. A brief overview of CLT as well as the functions and merits of using communicative language games as learning activities are presented in the following sections.

2.1 The Background of Communicative Language Teaching

CLT initiated in the 1960s in both Britain and America, and has prospered since the 1970s. Its development derives from general dissatisfaction with the linguistic theories – the British Situational Approach and the American Audiolingual Approach, both of which focus much more on the mechanistic aspects of language learning and language use through pattern drills, rote memorization and repetitive practice [4] [10] [11]. Characterized by its pedagogical emphasis on engaging learners in communicative interaction and meaning negotiation, CLT has marked a drastic shift from the traditional language teaching approaches which lay stress on the language usage of linguistic structures and forms to the communicative view on language teaching which focuses on meaningful language use in social contexts. Communicative Language Teaching therefore opens up a wider perspective on language teaching and learning.
2.2 Interpretations of Communicative Competence

CLT is an approach in ESL/EFL teaching aiming at developing learners’, in Hymes’ [12] words, ‘communicative competence’. In Hymes’ [13] view, those who have communicative competence possess both knowledge and ability for language use in diverse settings in their daily communication. That is to say, a communicatively competent language user is capable of using the most appropriate linguistic forms to convey her/his intended thoughts or meanings effectively in the target language. Similarly, four dimensions in Canale and Swain’s [14] model of communicative competence: ‘grammatical competence’, the knowledge of the rules of grammar, phonology and lexis; ‘sociolinguistic competence’, the capacity of appropriate language use in social contexts; ‘discourse competence’, the ability to produce coherent discourse and text; and ‘strategic competence’, the techniques to cope with the entire process of communication focus on both linguistic skills and communicative ability in text and discourse. All these dimensions of communicative competence emphasize the meaning potential of language itself as well as the importance of sociocultural contexts.

2.3 Characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching

(1) Enrichment and flexibility

Savignon [15] claims that the theoretical foundations of CLT have incorporated a wide range of insights from linguistics, philosophy, psychology, sociology and educational research on language use, and thus have broadened extra dimensions to traditional methodologies [16]. Also, Richards and Rodgers [4] comment that the principles of CLT reflect a communicative view on the theory of the nature of language, theory of language acquisition and theory of language teaching. In addition, differing from other teaching methods which specifically set a clear syllabus model for practice, the asset of CLT is that there is much room and freedom for practitioners to interpret, adapt and apply in a relatively flexible way as long as it helps promote learners’ acquisition of the target language.

(2) Humanistic view

In Audiolingualism, as a result of heavily relying on various types of tedious drilling and stimulus-response mechanisms, learners are discouraged from acquiring genuine and natural communication and would gradually fatigue and distaste in language learning [17]. Instead, CLT, a learner-centered teaching approach [18], treats learners as creative language users and active participants, and provides them with opportunities to transact communication with others [4]. With particular focus on using authentic language, offering a supportive learning atmosphere, selecting the topics which take learners’ individual variations into account, tolerating trials and errors as well as encouraging fluency, humanism is entirely embodied in CLT [3] [19] [20].

(3) Real communication

Traditional teaching methods restrict learners’ language use by narrowing the focus on linguistic forms and offering insufficient exposure to the authentic language. Krashen [21] stresses that acquisition of language is from using language communicatively instead of through practicing discrete language items intensively. The main goal of the communicative approaches is to promote learners’ communicative competence, which focuses on the learners’ meaningful use of real language to communicate effectively and properly in various contexts. Through a flexible variety of CLT activities which involve real communication, learners are given chances to negotiate or interact with others to get meaning or information across [2] [3] [22]. It is such communicative interaction that assists learners with a great leap to be communicatively-competent people.
(4) Authenticity

Authenticity is a key trait of language input in CLT. CLT places stress on using authentic or ‘from-life’ materials, such as television programs, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, lectures, advertisements, radio station broadcasts, road signs, audio-visual programs and so on. Exposing learners to authentic materials not only benefits them to develop strategies necessary to comprehend the target language that native speakers use in real-life communication, but also helps them to transfer what they have learned in the classroom to the real world [2].

(5) Task-based learning

Howatt [16] (p. 25) says, “the most significant change that CLT has brought to the classroom has been the inclusion of communicative activities in the repertoire of practice exercises”. CLT shifts the emphasis from traditional drills and exercises to communicative activities for learners to carry out meaningful interaction [23]. In CLT lessons, learners are involved actively in task-based and goal-oriented activities such as problem solving, role playing, games and discussions. When participating in communicative tasks, learners are encouraged to use whatever resources they have to achieve the goal of the task [1], and at the same time they are rehearsing skills necessary for real communication outside the classroom [24]. As Maley [25] (p. 11) stresses, “communicative functions arise naturally from the activity itself”. That is, through various interactive activities, the communicative purposes can be attained.

(6) Teacher and student roles

In CLT, the teacher, basically, is a need analyst who evaluates students’ communication needs and motivation to design activities at an appropriately challenging level. The teacher is also a classroom manager to organize learning settings and activities for effective communication. Furthermore, the teacher is a counselor and facilitator who is available as a source of guidance and provides feedback on students’ performance. In addition, the teacher takes part as an independent participant who monitors the group activities in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of students for planning future learning activities [3] [4]. Students, on the other hand, are communicators, negotiators, and responsible managers of their own learning in a communicative classroom [2] [4] which puts stress on the process of communication through performing activities and requires learners to negotiate, discuss, interact and communicate with their peers in order to accomplish various communicative purposes desired.

(7) Four skills

Language should not be separated into its component parts, and must be seen as a whole entity in which speaking, listening, reading and writing are integrated. Whitley [26] notes that CLT, a holistic teaching approach, places equal importance on all four skills. Richards and Rodgers [4] echo this point of view that the four language skills can be approached from CLT, which assists communication more efficiently.

2.4 Communicative Activities

Unlike form-based approaches which place stress on drilling particular language patterns, the ‘communicative activity’, the major feature of CLT, intends to immerse learners in meaning making for a communicative purpose [2]. That is, communicative language activities involving information gaps and opinion gaps are designed for learners to exchange information or express opinions through using the target language in order to complete tasks [27]. More specifically, communicative activities in the form of games create a context where learners are engaged in the use of the target language to negotiate meanings, share information and interact with others within
meaningful contexts. Within CLT, it is expected that through operating communicative tasks learners can go beyond the mastery of structures to communicate meanings in real situations. The advantages of using communicative language games in English language teaching are stated as follows.

(1) Motivate students’ learning with fun, enjoyment and excitement

Language games are highly motivating [7]. Enjoyment, excitement and passion are naturally generated from playing games. As Adam [28] indicates, games are self-motivating to stimulate learners’ interest and curiosity, which benefits learners best to play with the language in their first stages of language learning. With a low affective filter [21], game-like activities are meaningful and playful, thus they motivate children to learn, arouse their interest, and develop positive attitudes towards language learning. Such classroom activities are particularly suitable for primary school pupils who like to play games. When pupils are enjoying playing games, at the same time, they are learning language unconsciously.

(2) Supply chances to use language in authentic contexts

Communicative task itself is central to CLT. Learners experience language use through performing activities in the form of games. That is, in game situations, learners are exposing themselves to the target language environment. They use whatever language resources available to them in order to achieve task goals, for instance, solving a problem, sharing or comparing opinion and culture. Therefore, games provide learners with chances and authentic contexts where they feel the need to use real-life language to communicate with others meaningfully and purposefully [3].

(3) Provide practice on language use and language usage

Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby [7] state that many games are designed to offer learners a density of communicative language practice as conventional drill exercises, but in a rather meaningful way by working language as living communication to convey information and opinion. By doing so, learners are immersed in using the target language in all four skills, which assists them to better internalize a new language. Games, therefore, can be viewed as integral parts of communicative lessons and can be used, at any time whenever necessary and appropriate, to warm up a lesson, to present new items, to provide practice for previously introduced language points, to serve as a substitute for unsatisfactory materials, to end a lesson as follow-up activities.

(4) Create an agreeable and supportive learning environment

Different from conventional teaching methods through which many students have frustrating experiences of language learning, games present language learners with communicative or problem-solving situations that are enjoyable and relatively stress free. In game situations, the teacher encourages all attempts at communication in the target language rather than continuous error correction. In such a way, without fear of failure or public correction, students will feel emotionally secure and will be more confident to explore and take risks with new language [29], which further enhances students’ active involvement as well as intrinsic motivation, and above all, leads to better learning.

(5) Promote interpersonal relations

Activities involving communicative interaction provide many opportunities for cooperative relationships to come out, both among students and between the teacher and students because in game situations the class is often divided into pairs or groups, which makes students naturally interact with others [3]. Such partnership and cooperation among students generating while carrying out game activities encourages social and emotional
development, which humanizes the classroom and eases the process of learning and teaching [30].

In sum, communicative activities in the form of games play a crucial role in Communicative Approach (CA) to language teaching and learning. Communicative games can increase learners’ interest in learning, expose them to meaningful contexts, involve them in the use of the target language, and eventually develop their communicative competence, the main goal of Communicative Language Teaching.

3. Methodology

3.1 Instrument

The study was designed to explore Taiwanese elementary school teachers’ perspectives on using communicative language games in English language teaching. Seven major areas were included in the exploration of this study. They are: students’ learning motivation from communicative language games, usefulness of communicative language games, attitudes of students and parents towards the use of communicative language games, students’ language problems hindering the effectiveness of communicative language games, difficulties encountered by teachers in using communicative language games, frequency of using communicative language games, and the kinds of communicative language games which are most frequently used. On the basis of a review of the literature dealing with the use of language games in second and foreign language education [8] [9], 19 items in a four-point Likert scale (‘strongly agree (SA)’, ‘agree (A)’, ‘disagree (D)’, and ‘strongly disagree (SD)’) were presented in the research questionnaire to survey the respondents’ opinions on the use of communicative language games in English lessons. In addition, with the intention to find out the frequency of conducting game activities and the most common communicative games used in English lessons, two more questions with choices were set.

3.2 Survey procedure

The survey questionnaires were sent to thirty Taiwanese public primary schools selected randomly. With the kind help of participants who were eligible teachers teaching English at public elementary schools in Taiwan, a total of one hundred and fifty-seven answered questionnaires were collected, of which 7 were excluded for incomplete answers. Valid questionnaire responses were therefore one hundred and fifty. It must be mentioned that the sample in this survey was a volunteer sample from a representative range that could be managed by the researcher. Although it cannot be claimed that the findings derived from this study absolutely reflect the perceptions of all English teachers who teach in Taiwanese primary schools, the research results, to some extent, reveal teachers’ classroom practice and their general attitudes towards the adoption of communicative language games in ELT at the time when the study was conducted.

4. Research Results and Discussions

Responses of each item on the questionnaire survey were converted into percentages and presented in Tables 1 to 7 for the purpose of analyzing and interpreting the results. Each table sheds light on one specific research question.

4.1 Results and discussions of Research Question 1 – To what extent do communicative language games motivate students to learn in English lessons?
Concerning teachers’ views about the power of communicative games on students’ motivation to learn English, it can be seen from Table 1 that almost all the participants appreciated the benefits of game activities. That ‘Games motivate students to learn in most lessons’ was consented by almost all respondents, with 99% agreeing and only 1% disagreeing. All respondents also believed that games help make lessons more interesting, with 73% strongly agreeing with the statement No. 6, and 27% agreeing.

**Facts derived from the figures**

Conducting games in teaching differs from the traditional teaching methods such as repetition, memorization and imitation which demotivate students’ incentive to learn. Teaching English through game-like activities can cheer up the class and make language learning more pleasurable and easier to learn. Most of all, games motivate students to become effective communicators in the target language, and help them use the language in a more spontaneous and natural manner [31]. Moreover, games are particularly suitable for most children at primary level who have a shorter attention span since the nature of games which provides joy, excitement and amusement can hold children’s attention and aid recall. Activities like these can not merely inspire and sustain students’ interest in learning English, but facilitate them to familiarize and reproduce features of language as well.

### 4.2 Results and discussions of Research Question 2 – How useful are communicative language games as learning activities in English lessons?

Table 2 shows the usefulness of game activities in English lessons. 79% of the respondents disagreed that they mainly used games just for filling in time, with 21% surprisingly admitting this to be the case. As learning activities, games were viewed as a useful way to present new learning items by most respondents. 64% of the sample agreed with the statement No. 3, with another 21% agreeing strongly. Also, there was popular agreement (91%) that students’ oral interchanges could be stimulated when they play games. Moreover, 87% of the teachers quite strongly disagreed that ‘Games are not as effective as other verbal explanations and written exercises’. In terms of the statement No. 10, more than half of the respondents (53%) did not think it difficult to
evaluate students’ learning from games, while 48% showed their agreement. It is worth noting from the responses obtained for the statement No. 4 that nearly all teachers (98%) replied that practice was still needed to consolidate what students have learned from game activities.

**Facts derived from the figures**

The results of Research Question 2, on the whole, show that the teachers generally appreciated the value of using games as language learning activities. With much emphasis on verbal explanations and various kinds of written exercises focusing on specific grammatical patterns, traditional teaching methods draw students’ attention on mechanistic aspects of language learning and language use. Therefore, even though some students are able to perform well on discrete-point tests, they often react incompetently when expected to integrate their linguistic knowledge in real communication. As language teachers, we ought to be aware that it is not enough to teach students how to manipulate the structures of foreign language, what also matters is to develop their strategies for relating these structures to their communicative functions in real situations. Game activities compatible with a communicative approach can help the teacher to create contexts in which students are required to give information, negotiate meaning or express their own opinions so that they are involved themselves in useful and meaningful language use. By doing so, students’ oral interchanges are stimulated, which has long been ignored in traditional English instruction in Taiwan.

Moreover, activities, integral elements in communicative lessons, can be used for teaching new items as well as for consolidating what students previously learned in a meaningful way. As Wright et al. [7] state, games can offer practice in all stages of teaching and learning sequence including presentation, practice and production. That is, many games can supply the same dense use of language as more conventional drills which mainly give repeated practice on a language form during a limited period of time. Such intense and meaningful practice of language forms through playing communicative games enables students to apply and internalize the particular language points learned in a relaxed and spontaneous situation. It is found by Savignon’s [32] research that learners who were encouraged to use linguistic knowledge at their disposal to exchange information, to clarify messages, and to negotiate meaning while carrying out communicative tasks, markedly outperformed learners who had no such practice. All these make it clear that using communicative games in teaching is a feasible way to present new items as well as to practice and reinforce specific skills that have already been taught. It is encouraging to see a majority of the teachers from the survey supported this view.

As far as evaluation is concerned, some teachers found it not easy to estimate the learning outcomes from games. Unlike the traditional assessments which focus solely on measuring students’ knowledge of linguistic structures and forms, the successful accomplishment of task-oriented games is judged by whether students are able to use whatever language resources they have to get meanings across as effectively as possible in order to cope with the communicative demands of a specific situation. In game situations, immediate feedback can be obtained from other participants [31]. Such feedback helps students realize how their performance is and assists the teacher to understand students’ learning in detail. Games, therefore, can act as a valuable reinforcement for students’ learning, and can also serve as a diagnostic device to tell the teacher what students already know and highlight the difficult areas encountered by students in order to design remedial follow-up exercises. From the above stated, it seems reasonable to conclude that communicative games, an essential component in CA lesson and useful to language acquisition, should be seen as central to a teacher’s classroom practice rather than for use as time fillers [7].
4.3 Results and discussions of Research Question 3 – What are the attitudes of students and parents towards the use of communicative language games in English lessons?

Table 3: attitudes of students and parents towards the use of communicative language games (figures in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Students dislike playing games in lessons.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Students are not aware of the purposes of playing games, and they feel they are playing but not learning.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Games are unsuitable for fifth and sixth graders.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Parents are not convinced that playing games has an educational effect to learning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 3, 97% of the respondents, with 59% disagreeing strongly, did not think that students disliked playing games at classes. More than one half of the respondents (66%) disagreed with the statement No. 13 ‘Students are not aware of the aims of playing games, and they feel they are playing but not learning’, whereas 35% thought that students did not see games as serious learning tasks. As to ‘Games are unsuitable for fifth and sixth graders’, the statement was denied by 73% of the teachers, with 28% showing agreement. In terms of parents’ attitudes towards the usefulness of games to children’s English learning, many teachers (79%) generally thought that parents were convinced of the educational value of playing language games as learning activities in English lessons.

Facts derived from the figures

Almost all the teachers in this study believed that students liked to play communicative games in English lessons. It is overt that games can enliven the atmosphere, refresh the tedious study air and make lessons more interesting. In addition to enjoyment, variety and flexibility of games may be also the key factors to motivate students in learning. Furthermore, some games involving a certain degree of challenge and competition can create excitement and stimulation for students to play with the language.

Most of the teachers considered that games were acceptable for fifth and sixth graders. However, some younger teenagers may be more self-conscious and think playing games over-childish and rather boring. In fact, games are suitable for all levels of learners including beginners and advanced, and are welcomed by any stages of age including children and adults. There are many types of games focusing on different language points and skills for different levels of language ability. Teachers should be aware and consider whether the activity they are going to conduct can satisfy their students’ needs and interests. It is the teacher’s responsibility to select appropriate games for the class, and change level of game difficulty and the skills to be reinforced whenever necessary so that students are active in using the language most of the time. It is also the teacher’s responsibility to prepare lessons well and conduct them masterfully so that learning through playing language games will not bore or tire students.

Children like to play games by nature. Language games give children chances to do something with the language in an enjoyable and stimulating way. While playing games, children informally prepare themselves for involvement in games as well as unconsciously internalize those language points that the games are intended to practice. It is true as pointed out by Adam [28] (p. 3) that “Through play children learn without even being aware of it”. Carrier and the Center for British Teachers [33] take a similar view by claiming that games can offer ‘hidden’ practice of specific language items without the awareness of students. Thus, games are not just for fun,
certainly, they also contain learning ingredients inside. However, to maximize the learning effect, teachers, before carrying out game sessions, should explain the real purposes of games to students and make sure they understand the educational value of learning through games so that students will have positive attitudes towards using game activities for serious learning.

As far as parents’ attitudes is concerned, most of the teachers, from their practical experiences, indicated that parents did not have the negative impression that their children playing games in class were learning nothing. It is comforting to see that most of the parents were convinced of the educational effect of playing communicative games in English lessons, and treated games as part of the formal learning. These parents did not take it for granted that teachers should use traditional ways in teaching. It is probably because via all kinds of mass media such as television, newspaper, books and the Internet, parents nowadays are more literate and open-minded so that they have more understanding about new teaching approaches. In addition, through attending seminars or parents’ days, parents have more contact with teachers to realize that communicative language games involving serious learning are beneficial to their children’s learning.

4.4 Results and discussions of Research Question 4 – Are there any students’ language problems which hinder the effectiveness of using communicative language games in English lessons?

Table 4: students’ language problems hindering the effectiveness of communicative language games (figures in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. The English competence of most students prevents them from playing most games.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Students are usually too shy or embarrassed to speak much English, even in game sessions.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 4, 72% of the participants did not regard the English competence of their students as a problem deterring them from playing most games, whereas 28% approved the statement No. 14. As for the responses given to the statement No. 15, quite unexpectedly, many teachers (70%) did not support the view that students felt too shy or embarrassed to speak much English in class.

Facts derived from the figures

As to students’ English proficiency, a majority of the teachers did not consider the English competence of the students as a hindrance which prohibited them from playing most games. The teachers thought that most students could immerse in playing games, provided that the game chosen was right for the students based on their level of cognition, emotion and language development. We know that students are heterogeneous in their intelligence, language ability, personality, interest and aptitude so that their individual differences should be taken into consideration when teachers select games for teaching. Harmer [34] claims that both high and low challenge activities equally demotivate students’ learning. Students may be frustrated if the game chosen is too difficult for them, and on the other hand, students may feel bored if they find it too easy. Adaptation of games is thus sometimes needed in order to meet the level of the class and cater for students’ needs and interests. In sum, we see that students’ English proficiency was not the main obstacle that deterred them from playing games, the effectiveness of using communicative language games in learning was mostly determined by the selection of appropriate games, sufficient preparation, systematic organization of game activities, careful arrangement of class,
and above all, interesting and stimulating presentation of a game lesson.

It is noticed that most teachers did not think that students felt embarrassed or too shy to speak much English in class. This may be partly because, in general, young children’s personality tend to be more active and less inhibited, and partly because a cheerful and supportive classroom atmosphere in game sessions reduces students’ fear of speaking English in class. However, it cannot be overemphasized that students’ errors should be viewed as a natural phenomenon in their development of communicative skills. Teachers should help students develop error awareness rather than continuously give immediate and direct error correction. With teachers’ greater tolerance, students are not being constantly corrected, which helps them avoid shyness or embarrassment while speaking English in public. To those students who are shy to speak English in front of others, having them work in pairs or small groups allows more individual student talk in a given time. In such a way, without fear of making mistakes or being corrected in class, shy or less confident students will feel free and want to talk more. For less able students, they can also take advantage of doing a task in pairs or small groups. Because of peer interaction, weaker students can learn from what better students say, and better students can improve as well through having to paraphrase and explain [1]. Furthermore, it is also of importance that the teacher had better not forbid students’ use of mother tongue but encourage and help them speak in English. Through such exploratory talk and confidence building, students who used to be timid will eventually want to talk. In addition, setting a practical token system for prizes or credit-earning rules is another useful way to encourage students to participate in talking and to motivate them to involve in game activities, and this works pretty well particularly for primary school pupils.

4.5 Results and discussions of Research Question 5 – What are the difficulties a teacher may encounter in using communicative language games in English lessons?

Table 5: difficulties encountered by teachers in using communicative language games (figures in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. It takes much time for preparation of games.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Playing games causes discipline problems.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. There is a lack of materials for good language games in textbooks.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. There are too many students per class to play games.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The physical environment of classroom is not suitable for playing games.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the general responses about the difficulties teachers may encounter while using communicative language games in their teaching. One can see that only the responses to the statements No. 7 and No. 18 show slightly over half of the respondents considering those to be the problems they confronted when employing games in lessons – the physical classroom setting (57% agreeing) and time-consuming preparation (51% agreeing). For the statement No. 11 ‘There is a lack of materials for good language games in textbooks’, 50% of the participants felt that there was a shortage of adequate supply of games in school textbooks, and 51%, on the other hand, saw no problem about this. With regard to potential discipline problems caused by playing games in class, it is surprising to note that the discipline problem was not a key prevention for the teachers to conduct games at English classes as a majority (70%) showed disagreement that playing games led to chaos in the classroom. For the statement No. 17, 43% of the respondents claimed that having too many students per class made playing games difficult in English lessons. However, it is interesting to see that 58% of the teachers considered that the class size in Taiwan posed no
great problem.

Facts derived from the figures

The results of the research reveal that slightly more than one half of the teachers thought of the physical environment of classroom as a major constraint deterring them from using language games in their teaching. About half of the teachers considered that time-consuming preparation of game activities and lack of suitable resources for games posed problems which militated against teachers’ use of communicative games in class, but the weight of such opinions did not appear strong. Moreover, most teachers did not see discipline problems and class size as difficulties. As a whole, except for the statement No. 18 which is about classroom setting, the responses obtained from the research were neither strong in agreement nor strong in disagreement. Such results surprised the researcher. Before conducting this survey, the researcher assumed that all would have lent support to these statements and anticipated no disagreement at all. However, that was not the case here. The responses given to Research Question 5 reveal that the use of communicative language games as learning activities did not cause great difficulty in the teaching of English language for the teachers in Taiwanese primary schools. However, even the result was so, there were still some teachers indicating that they confronted the above problems against their use of communicative language games in English lessons. Below are several possible solutions that might be able to help teachers overcome the difficulties caused while trying to conduct communicative language games in teaching.

Concerning the classroom setting, in CA lessons, children are often required to move about and do things while carrying out activities, and it will be therefore a great advantage if they can get out easily from their seats. However, the classrooms in Taiwanese elementary schools are usually not big enough to have plenty space for the teacher and students to move around freely, and it is rather troublesome and time-consuming to rearrange the formal classroom setting. Accordingly, language games designed for pair or small-group work may be a good means to solve this problem. For work in pairs, desks just need to be pushed together or against each other to have students face their opposite partner or the partner near by them, which makes it easier to exchange books or worksheets for discussion or mutual correction [35]. Alternative ways are to have lessons take place outside, for instance, the playground, or to have students rearrange the furniture beforehand so that the precious minutes of language lessons will not be wasted for this purpose. All the possibilities need to be used to the utmost in order to overcome the fact that there is insufficient room in the classroom.

In Taiwan, teachers must follow coursebooks and syllabuses provided by workplaces or local educational authorities as the main basis for their teaching. However, some textbooks may offer very limited or unsuitable activities to promote learners’ language use or stimulate real communication. To reflect the features of CA-based teaching and guide material development and classroom practice, the MOE has opened up the English textbook market and published new versions of English textbooks compiled on the basis of the principles of CLT for both primary and secondary schools. Therefore, more commercially produced materials for communicative language games have been provided for language teachers’ use. This may help, in part, to solve the shortage of suitable game materials in some textbooks and alleviate the time-consuming preparation of games for teachers. In addition to making good use of available commercially prepared teaching materials, teachers themselves can collect or devise, with imagination and creativity, new language games by studying magazines, reading newspaper, watching television programs, or surfing the Internet. In fact, any games or activities can be applied as language-learning materials provided that they involve language elements and are pleasurable [7]. Moreover, for the sake of saving
time and reducing teachers’ workloads, it is advisable to file the game activities and store them in good condition for future use.

With regard to discipline problems, learning English through activities often produces higher level of noise. Classroom management is thus a great concern to many teachers. Teachers may use some signals to have students lower their voices or stop talking. Setting a specific time limit for performing a task is also needed in order not to tire or bore students. It is essential, also, that the goals and rules of a game should be clearly explained to students before conducting an activity because students’ confusion and misunderstanding about a game may bring about chaos [7]. Furthermore, it is not unimportant that teachers and the school authorities should realize that the dynamic nature of the Communicative Approach creates an enjoyable classroom environment where students may look disordered (i.e., because they get involved in making meaning construction in game activities) but they are actually learning.

As far as class size is concerned, in one class with an average of 35 students in Taiwanese primary schools, teachers may find it difficult to pay attention to each pupil and offer individuals equal chances to talk. Therefore, the larger the class, the greater the need for small groups or pair work to provide students with more opportunities for intensive listening and speaking practice, and to enhance teacher-student and student-student interaction. That is, only through doing learner-centered activities and pair or small-group work can students have opportunities to learn to communicate more efficiently. In such a way, the problem of large class size can be partly solved and the time distributed to each pupil for communication can be maximized as well.

In addition, another practical way to help improve teachers’ abilities to overcome the problems they may confront in game sessions may be by virtue of the frequent provision of in-service teacher training courses both linguistically and methodologically. The administrative authorities can hold relevant conferences or workshops, and encourage teachers to take study programs in this field for gaining more understanding of the current English teaching environment and learning more up-to-date information and hands-on teaching experience including the design of game activities, the techniques of adopting communicative game materials in lessons and the skills of classroom management and so on. Last but not least, the teacher’s own positive belief, enthusiasm and attitude towards the use of communicative language games in teaching are the most critical factors that greatly influence the extent to which the teacher solves the difficulties encountered while conducting games or game-like activities.

4.6 Results and discussions of Research Question 6 – How often are communicative language games used in English lessons?

Table 6: frequency of using communicative language games (figures in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses to the questionnaire question 20 shown on Table 6 make it clear that the majority (90%) did employ communicative language games quite often in English lessons, with 57% of the teachers conducting them weekly. Only 9% hardly ever used games, and there was no one who never used games in lessons.

Facts derived from the figures
Referring to Tables 1 and 2, it can be seen that many teachers in this study did appreciate the value of playing communicative language games in learning, which is in line with the finding gained from Table 6 that shows the teachers used games fairly frequently in their teaching. Based on such results, we may, therefore, reasonably conclude that being the decision-makers and conductors in the classroom, teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards communicative language games greatly affect frequency of their adoption of such games in lessons.

4.7 Results and discussions of Research Question 7 – What kinds of communicative language games are most frequently used in English lessons?

Table 7: the communicative language games most frequently used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of game</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>104 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>101 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling/vocabulary Games</td>
<td>96 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Games</td>
<td>88 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td>73 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen and Do</td>
<td>71 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing Games</td>
<td>52 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Games</td>
<td>47 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Games</td>
<td>39 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumble Sentences</td>
<td>20 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>18 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>11 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miming</td>
<td>10 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatization</td>
<td>10 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Games</td>
<td>10 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among different types of communicative language games listed above, competition was the most frequently used game type by the teachers in the study. Other quite popular games included songs, spelling/vocabulary games and picture games, while the rarely adopted ones were discussion, miming, dramatization and computer games.

**Facts derived from the figures**

According to Table 7, it seems apparent that those indicated by the teachers as the often used communicative language games need less preparation, involve no rearrangement of classroom setting, cause minor discipline problems, and are easier to manage. On the other hand, probably because of a lack of suitable materials, time-consuming preparation and insufficient facilities, discussion, miming, dramatization and computer games were noted as the games which the teachers infrequently employed in lessons. Obviously, most of the teachers preferred to choose game activities in teaching which were not too bothersome to carry out and required less effort. Accordingly, there is a necessity to improve school teaching facilities such as Digital Video Disks, CD ROMs and the Internet in order to immerse learners in valuable language exposure, interest them in learning, and create a dynamic atmosphere, which are in demand for a communicative classroom. Also, the use of such multimedia aids can ease teachers’ working burden, so as to adopt certain games like discussion, dramatization and computer games. It would be a pity that students are deprived of the benefits of learning from playing games just because of insufficient facilities. As a result, in the long term, it is certainly worthwhile for the educational authorities to make efforts to improve school teaching facilities.
5. Conclusions
The call for the application of Communicative Language Teaching is not accidental. It comes from the educational problems which are needed to be solved – the existing unsatisfactory teaching results of the conventional approaches. CLT offers a change in Taiwanese language education from the traditional grammar-oriented practice methods towards using communicative language activities as the core units of teaching and learning for students to participate in meaning-focused interaction. As language teachers, we are ultimately concerned with developing students’ ability to process communication by using the target language. In CLT, learning is part of the task itself. Through processing creative game activities, learners experience language use for the purpose of truly meaningful communication. It is learning through natural exposure and meaningful use of the target language while conducting communicative activities that motivates learners to take more interest in language learning and assists them to develop learner autonomy. Nowadays CLT has become a term for curriculum design, method development and practice implementation of English language teaching in Taiwan. It is suggested that teachers make good use of the advantages of CLT to create a rather comfortable, supportive and learner-centered learning environment beneficial to equip students with much exposure to the target language use. It is also suggested that the educational authorities should be ready to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our education system, and modify it to nurture and prepare the younger generation for English language proficiency necessary to take our country forward. It is hoped that our children are able to master language knowledge and use language skills to communicate properly in various settings, and also maintain their interest in continuing learning English outside the classroom. Last but not least, it is also expected that our children can possess a worldview and convey their thoughts in English to become the persons who are capable of communicating with the whole world.

References
[18] Williams, J., “Focus on form in communicative language teaching: Research findings and the classroom teacher,” TESOL


