



# The Role of Educational Games in Teaching Foreign Languages

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## OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 18 February 2025

ACCEPTED 16 March 2025

PUBLISHED 17 April 2025

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue 04 2025

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**Abstract:** This article will discuss the role and importance of games in teaching foreign languages. First of all, we will learn about the origin of the word "game." Then we will consider the types of games in education in language learning today. In addition, the article also provides examples of scientific research on games and their positive results in the educational process.

**Keywords:** The word "ludic," game, board games, word games, audiovisuals, individual activities.

**Introduction:** The introduction of games in the classroom aligns with the perspective of language learning through task execution, as recommended by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR places great importance on the playful, aesthetic, and poetic use of language (sections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5) in a decidedly action-oriented approach.

This document states that using language for games or creativity often plays an important role in learning and improvement but does not belong exclusively to the educational field (CEFR)

## Here are some types of games as examples:

Board games:

- Oral games (false stories or “find the mistake”; how, when, where, etc.)
- Written games (Hangman, etc.)
- Audiovisual games (picture bingo, etc.)
- Card and board games (Scrabble, Lexicon, etc.)
- Charades and miming, etc.

Individual activities:

- Riddles and puzzles (crosswords, rebuses, anagrams, charades, etc.)

– Media games (radio and television: Des chiffres et des lettres, Questions pour un champion, Le Jeu des mille francs, etc.)

Word games (puns, etc.):

– In advertising, for example, for a car: La 106, un sacré numéro (The 106, a hell of a number).

– In newspaper headlines, for example, during a Paris metro strike: La galère sans les rames (The ordeal without the oars).

– In graffiti, for example: Dessine-moi un jour plus vieux (Draw me an older day), etc.

### What is the purpose of a game?

Before defining the value of the word "game," we can say that playfulness is in line with the didactic ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote in *Émile*: "Give the child the desire to learn, and any method will be good."

We would also like to remind you of Pablo Neruda's words: "A child who does not play is not a child, but the man who does not play has lost the child who lived within him."

It seems that all definitions used by authors are contradictory. We could accept one definition as legitimate as another, and since every definition is subjective, it can always be contested. If we take the dictionary definition of the word "game" as "an activity aimed at pleasure, at self-distraction and entertaining others," we are far from the educational aspect—the teacher's goal of helping students discover, learn, and modify their knowledge or behavior.

The word "game" (from the Latin *Jocus*, meaning joke or jest) primarily evokes pleasure, which is the main objective of the player.

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Games are an integral part of our lives. They allow us, for a moment, to step out of the "here and now", to experiment, imagine, create, and test our ability to solve new problems. Existing games, whether transformed, extended, or adapted with new variations, serve as a valuable resource for teaching French in schools.

### Essential Characteristics of a Game

The essential characteristics of a game can be summarized in a few words: pleasure, spontaneity, gratuity (performing an act for its own sake), and creativity in execution. Games fulfill a need for relaxation, enjoyment, exploration, and self-discovery. They help individuals organize and structure their mental processes, as well as develop their cognitive and emotional abilities.

Games apply to all age groups, social categories, and personality types—from the shyest to the boldest individuals.

Here, we will start with the common definition of the word "game":

1. "A recreational activity that follows certain more or less strict rules."

According to Le Petit Robert:

2. "A game is a purely gratuitous physical or mental activity that, in the consciousness of the participant, has no goal other than the pleasure it provides."

3. "An activity organized by a system of rules defining success and failure, gain and loss."

From these definitions, we can see two common elements: the recreational nature of games and the presence of a set of behavioral rules.

To truly understand the concept of a game, we must refer to its practical usage—how the term is commonly applied. The only legitimate definition can be descriptive, much like dictionary entries, which compile "all observable uses of the word at a given time." But can this descriptive approach help us understand, beyond its usage, what a game really is?

### Why Use Games in the Classroom?

Motivation for students in compulsory education.

Playfulness often allows struggling students to actively participate in classroom activities.

Learning becomes more enjoyable.

A valuable tool for helping students express themselves by reducing the anxiety associated with speaking.

In fact, a well-integrated game in the classroom can be just as relevant as a grammar exercise or other types of activities.

### Preliminary Questions About Using Games in Lessons

Before incorporating games into lessons, some preliminary questions should be considered:

1. What is the objective of the chosen game?
2. Who is the target audience?
3. What prior knowledge should students have to effectively engage in the activity?
4. At what point in the lesson should it be used? At the beginning? At the end?

To answer the last question, we rely on practical experience:

**Brainstorming**, which encourages students to recall and use all relevant vocabulary, is best placed at the beginning of the lesson to introduce the topic.

**Presentation activities**, also known as icebreakers, help create a relaxed atmosphere and are used at the beginning of the first session.

**Role-playing games** are better suited for the end of a lesson, as they allow students to apply what they have just learned.

Speaking or writing in a foreign language can be stressful. A learner feels vulnerable when asked to express themselves in front of the class. Games provide an opportunity to reduce this anxiety. The enjoyment they create helps students momentarily forget their fears, encouraging them to take risks and engage more freely. Isn't this one of the main goals of foreign language teaching?

For students to feel comfortable with natural communication, the classroom must provide opportunities to practice their skills in situations that closely resemble real-life interactions—not only with the teacher but also with their peers. They need a space to test their linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic skills in order to unlock the keys to successful communication in the target language. Games offer precisely this kind of experiential learning

#### **Another Major Advantage of Playful Activities**

Another major advantage of playful activities is that they strengthen group cohesion, creating an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, and respect. This allows each learner to feel included and confident enough to express their needs. These activities foster connections between participants through group work. They also enable diverse student interactions by forming and varying groups. This friendly and enjoyable environment makes students look forward to their lessons and attend with greater enthusiasm. They are also more motivated to progress in order to enrich their exchanges.

A brief exploration of playfulness brings us into the didactic world of the Latin term *ludus*, which means both game and learning, school. Playful activities are not opposed to the educational aspect that games can provide. Each of us, based on personal experience, is well aware of the formative virtues of playful activities: respecting roles, paying attention, and using memory.

The frequent use of collective or semi-collective activities in games allows students to learn from one another and contribute their own knowledge to help the group reach a common goal. Through these exchanges, individuals develop within the collective. Students are no longer just passive recipients of knowledge from the teacher; instead, they share knowledge among themselves and become aware of their own learning. This generally boosts their

confidence in their abilities.

At the same time, the teacher gains more freedom to observe students and can adapt the course based on the gaps and needs identified during the process.

#### **The Impact of Games on Learning**

Due to the diversity of activities that can be incorporated, the learner takes on multiple roles: reader, receiver, writer, speaker, and interlocutor. They are encouraged to activate their knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, and lexicon, reinvesting these skills in an engaging and flexible environment where they determine their own level of performance.

Games foster interaction, where the learner is both a receiver and a producer, requiring them to anticipate responses while actively listening—just as in real-life social interactions.

This principle aligns with the idea that individuals learn best when they are fully engaged in an activity. Research has already demonstrated that our retention rates depend on how we interact with information:

We remember 10% of what we read,

20% of what we hear,

30% of what we see,

50% of what we see and hear simultaneously.

Under the same conditions, retention rates significantly improve when engagement increases:

We remember 80% of what we say,

90% of what we say while actively doing something related to it and reflecting on it.

This demonstrates the power of interactive learning methods, where playful engagement enhances comprehension and memory retention.

#### **The Role of Discourse Functions in Games**

Additionally, through the experience of games, learners will naturally put into practice two key functions of discourse:

1. **The propositional function** (what words mean).
2. **The illocutionary function** (what we do with words; for example, giving orders, making accusations, apologizing, etc.).

These two functions will be activated spontaneously.

As recommended by the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), it is essential to propose tasks with motivating yet achievable goals. Therefore, activities should be based on learners' communicative needs, their general and linguistic competencies, and their available resources. A high level of personal motivation in task completion leads to

greater involvement and, consequently, a more effective mobilization of prior knowledge and experiences. This knowledge is then compared with that of their peers, allowing them to reach a new level of proficiency.

### Three Key Questions Before Introducing a Game in Class

There are three important aspects a teacher must consider before engaging the class in a game-based activity:

#### 1. Prerequisite Knowledge:

Do learners have the necessary tools to participate in the activity with a sense of security?

If not, the teacher should introduce preparatory tasks (such as answering questions, identifying key linguistic structures, or listening comprehension exercises) to help them engage more effectively.

#### 2. Learning Objectives:

Does the proposed activity align with the objectives set by the teacher?

These objectives may be linguistic, functional, cultural, etc

#### 3. The Relevance of the Activity

Does it make sense to introduce this activity at this particular moment?

Does it fit within the progression of the course?

In some cases, the primary purpose of a game may simply be enjoyment. However, even when the main goal is entertainment, the game still brings communicative benefits by immersing students in language use and practice.

### The Importance of Clear Instructions

One crucial aspect to consider is how the instructions for the game are given. The way instructions are delivered plays a decisive role in the success of the activity.

Instructions must be very clear and given only once at first.

If any misunderstandings arise, students can ask questions afterward.

Repeating the same instructions in different words too many times can lead to confusion rather than clarity.

If the instructions are particularly complex, it is better to break them down into smaller steps.

Giving multiple pieces of information at the same time is always risky, as it can overwhelm learners.

By ensuring clarity in instruction, teachers can help students fully engage in the activity without unnecessary distractions or misunderstandings.

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