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Using Games as a Teaching Methodology for English as Foreign Language: a Case Study in a Primary School

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation deals with the teaching of English as a foreign language through games. The choice of this topic was motivated by the interest in exploring new methodologies of language teaching and learning. The dissertation aims to evaluate the use of language teaching games, i.e., playful activities whose purpose is to teach or reinforce language skills. The nature of the research is mainly practical: it consists of a classroom research project in a primary school designed to collect data about the students' and the teacher's opinion on language teaching games. The data collected are analysed and discussed in relation to the following question: are competitive language teaching games valuable activities for language teaching and learning?

The theoretical study and research on the playful language teaching methodology are at the basis of the dissertation. Indeed, the first chapter starts by providing an overview of games as a language teaching methodology. The chapter begins by giving a definition of the word *game*: games and playing are activities that human beings need to do and are ordered by rules fixed by participants. They play an important role in human life, as games are fundamental elements to socialize and communicate among people. Moreover, games can teach significant elements such as the importance of fixed rules, an established timeframe and the creation of a fictional reality accepted among participants. The use of games as a language teaching methodology is referred to as playful language teaching methodology (Caon 2020:446). The dissertation continues by analysing the affective humanistic approach, to which the playful language teaching methodology belongs. The term humanistic-affective approach refers to the approach which considers learners and their personal needs at the centre of the learning process. This aim of this approach is to focus on the individual as a person and on his or her needs not only from a pragmatic and communicative point of view, but also from a personal one. Therefore, the main concept of this approach is to consider students not only as learners, but also and above all as individuals. The goal of humanistic education goes beyond cognitive and intellectual education and embraces the education of the whole person. The playful language teaching methodology is founded on the humanistic-affective approach and consists of educational paths and language teaching techniques based on games. Indeed, the playful language teaching methodology shares the same goals with the humanistic-affective approach, as

it aims to eliminate learning obstacles such as stress or anxiety, it works on long-term memory and considers learners' emotional involvement. Games can encourage learners to use the language for a meaningful purpose, that of playing, meanwhile forgetting that they are learning a foreign language. Therefore, students can learn languages by having fun and enjoying themselves, and motivation is created upon students' positive emotions and on their entertainment. The chapter then continues by making an important distinction between free games and educational games. Free games imply psychophysical and cognitive engagement on the part of students, but they have no specific goals outside of it. On the other hand, educational games also involve psychophysical and cognitive effort, but unlike free games, they contain specific learning goals. Hence, educational games aim to convey lexical or grammatical contents, creating an interactive and engaging atmosphere for learners, and are previously planned by teachers. Indeed, in this type of methodology the role of teachers is fundamental, as they should develop their strategy taking in consideration several aspects, including age of students, their communicative needs, their individual interests, and their speed of learning. The chapter then underlines the potential of the game-based methodology as a means of intercultural education and inclusive learning. Indeed, games can be a form of intercultural education as they can promote cultural decentralisation, deconstruction of prejudices, and overcoming xenophobic and racist attitudes. At the same time, games can improve the quality of learning for people with learning disabilities and respond to the need for inclusive special education support. Finally, the last section of the chapter deals with the evaluation of games. As games create an environment in which students can demonstrate their skills to their full extent while being aware of their learning process and capable of avoiding negative emotive filters, multiple abilities can be evaluated through the use of games.

The second chapter focuses on the organization and classification of language teaching games that can be used in classrooms. The chapter begins by discussing some practical aspects of the organization of games, such as timing, organization of the class, and language level. Thus, teachers should think about what is best for the class and what is affordable, considering the set learning goals and adjust the games to the various stages of the teaching unit. Teachers should also consider whether it is better to work individually or in groups, according to the needs and features of their students. In the case of teamwork, the decision on how to form the groups should be taken by teachers, as it

may take the entire lesson and result in groups of unequal skills. Another key aspect to consider is whether and how to set a score. To guarantee a good and welcoming environment, students should be rewarded if they complete the game successfully but should not be penalised if they do not. The following section continues by describing the classification of language teaching games. The section explains the ontogenetic classification of games, which divides games into three categories: exercise games (functional games), symbolic games and rule games. For each game category, it follows a description and the language teaching games related to it. The chapter then follows by describing the main types of language teaching games and their features. Role-playing games, process drama, video games, board games and competitive games will be described in detail explaining their characteristics and possible complications. Special attention is given to competitive games, as these are the games that were played in the classroom during the research project in a primary school. Indeed, the last section of the chapter discusses the advantages and disadvantages of competition in language learning and some studies carried out on the topic.

The third chapter regards the research project on competitive language teaching games for English as a foreign language in a primary school. Firstly, general information regarding classroom research is provided. Classroom research, also known as action research, is a type of research that focuses on language teaching and is conducted by teachers in their own classrooms or in the classrooms of their colleagues. It is the collection and analysis of data to describe what happens during language classes. Its purpose is to understand what is happening in the classroom and why, in relation to teaching and learning. It means that teachers act, often in the form of an intervention, to systematically investigate a problem in the classroom through research that they believe is worth investigating to improve some aspect of classroom teaching or learning. The research can be conducted in several ways: direct observation, questionnaires, recordings (audio and video), diaries, and discussion with the subjects involved. The chapter then describes some classroom research projects conducted on games that had successful results in language teaching. The second section of the chapter describes my own research project and the means through which it has been carried out: direct observation, personal journal, students' questionnaire, and interview with the English teacher. The project consisted of two one-and-a-half hour lessons in a primary school on the use of competitive

games to test whether they could be valid classroom activities with a positive impact on language teaching and learning. As the aim of the games was vocabulary learning, the lessons addressed two distinct categories of vocabulary: physical description, clothing, and accessories in the first lesson, and wild animals in the second lesson. The section describes the phases and the organization of the project, also providing images of the materials used for the games. This is followed by a detailed description of the games devised and the worksheets used in the classroom. The last section of the chapter describes the structure of the lessons and the organization of the class during the games.

The fourth and last chapter focuses on the results of the research project. The chapter begins by providing a detailed analysis of the games carried out in the classroom and an explanation of the theory behind the creation of them. The theoretical assumptions of the first and second chapters and the data gathered are compared, in order to give an answer to the abovementioned question. This is followed by the discussion of the results of the students' questionnaire. The questionnaire (which is provided in Appendix 1) was administered by the teacher during her lesson the day after the end of the project. The games were meant to be an enjoyable activity and not a test of students' abilities. Therefore, no tests on the students' acquired knowledge were carried out. The third section of the chapter analyses the interview conducted with the English teacher on her opinion on the use of games as a language teaching methodology and on the project. The interview with the teacher and direct observation during the games provided insights into the limitations of the project and possible further research, which are discussed in the fourth and fifth sections of the chapter. Finally, concluding remarks on the research are provided.

CHAPTER I

The playful language teaching methodology

In this chapter, I will provide an overview on the playful language teaching methodology. Firstly, I will give a definition of the word *game* and then focus on the affective-humanistic approach and its groundings in the playful language teaching methodology. In particular, I will concentrate on the importance of motivation, meaningful learning and the role of teachers. Secondly, I will consider the affinities and differences in games for children, adolescents and adults. Thirdly, I will look at the playful language teaching methodology as an opportunity to foster intercultural education and inclusive learning, and how to evaluate this methodology in the classroom.

1.1 What is a game?

The word “game” comes from the Old English noun “gamen” which means “joy, fun; game, amusement” (Online Etymology Dictionary 2023). Since the second half of the 20th century, many scholars have tried to define the word *game* by giving a clear meaning. Huizinga’s (1949:28) defines *game* as:

“A voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary life’. Thus defined, the concept seemed capable of embracing everything we call ‘play’ in animals, children and grown-ups: games of strength and skill, inventing games, guessing games, games of chance, exhibitions and performances of all kinds. We ventured to call the category ‘play’ one of the most fundamental in life.”

As stated by Huizinga, games and playing are activities that human beings need to do and are ordered by rules fixed by participants. Huizinga defines different categories of games according to the skills required to play them, and can be classified as games of strength, performance games and games based on luck.

The reflection on the definition of *game* given by Huizinga had an impact on another writer, Caillois, who quotes him at the beginning of his work *Les Jeux et Les Hommes*,

(1958), and makes a change in Huizinga's definition by adding six elements to identify what a game effectively is. He states that the activity of playing must be *free* for participants, *circumscribed* in time and place, *uncertain* in its results, *unproductive* as it does not generate economic wealth, *regulated* by consent between participants and *artificial* as it creates a situation which differs from reality (Caillois 1994:26). Caillois continues his explanation by clarifying that the last two game qualities are in opposition to each other and cannot co-exist and, therefore, if one appears, the other has to be limited or absent. Moreover, according to the theorization of games advanced by Caillois' (1994:30–45), it is not possible to categorize games using the qualities mentioned before due to their structure. For this reason, other aspects must be considered, and he describes four principles that define and classify games by looking at their individual features: *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry* and *ilinx*. He calls *agon* games which involve competition, *alea* games in which victory is chosen by chance, *mimicry* games based on performance and imitation, and *ilinx* games based on vertigo. Caillois also makes another distinction by creating two poles which represent different ways of playing; *paidia*, which is the spontaneous enjoyment of improvisation and instinctual expression, is in the first pole, and *ludus*, which is completely different from *paidia* and refers to the self-control of a player's personal skills, is in the second pole.

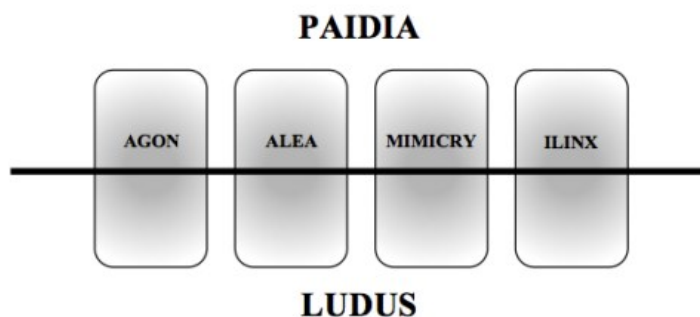


Figure 1: Caillois' game categories (1994:32)

Throughout his work, Caillois deals also with the role of games in life, and he considers games as fundamental elements to socialize and communicate among people (Caillois 1994:56).

Suits (1967:148) defines the term game as:

“To play a game is to engage in activity directed toward bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by specific rules, where the means permitted by the rules are more limited in scope than they would be in the absence of the rules, and where the sole reason for accepting such limitation is to make possible such activity.” (Suits 1967:148)

The definitions proposed by the abovementioned authors share common traits such as the importance of fixed rules, an established timeframe and the creation of a fictional reality accepted among participants. Moreover, another fundamental aspect that is never questioned by these scholars is the importance of games and its belonging to human nature.

1.2 The affective-humanistic approach

The term humanistic-affective approach refers to the approach developed since the 1970s which considers learners and their personal needs at the centre of the learning process. This approach’s aim is to focus on the individual as a person and on his or her needs not only from a pragmatic and communicative point of view, but also from a personal one. Therefore, the main concept of this approach is to consider students not only as learners, but also and above all as individuals (Rahman 2013:77–81).

This approach was developed by Carl Rogers (1902-1987), American psychotherapist and educator, who was concerned about the social consequences of intellectual and cognitive learning, which had a negative impact on the learner's sense of self. According to Roger, learners should be treated considering their emotion, cognition, and specific affective factors. Thus, learners should not feel nervous or uncomfortable about the entire learning environment. Moreover, Roger claimed that good teachers should share some traits with good therapists, such as congruence, empathy, and unconditional regard. These aspects are essential to support students to become fully functioning individuals ready to deal with the needs of the modern world and, for this reason, students should be treated as patients with specific needs, and teachers should assume a role like that of a therapist (Rahman 2013:80–81). Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to all those factors that can influence on individuals’ learning, by developing good relationships with peers, fully involving students in the learning process, and creating a relaxed environment within the

group. Thanks to this approach, teachers can put the students' needs, individuality and their self-realisation at the centre of the teaching process (Ceriani 2014:8).

Since the 1970s, several language teaching methodologies based on the affective-humanistic approach have been developed, and they involve the following (Rahman 2013:81): Suggestopedia, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning (CLL) and Total Physical Response (TPR). Rahman classifies them as affective-humanistic methodologies as they share a humanistic attitude and come from a related psychology and philosophy of education. The goal of humanistic education goes beyond cognitive and intellectual education and embraces the education of the whole person. It concerns personal and creative growth, and the end of education should be the same as the end of psychotherapy: becoming a fully functioning person (Yadav 2022:2).

In the following sections, I will provide a brief overview on these methodologies by focusing on their potential in foreign language learning and their connection with the playful language teaching methodology.

1.2.1 Suggestopedia

The word *Suggestopedia* comes from the combination of the verb "suggest," which means "to propose" or "to offer" and "pedagogy". This indicates that this methodology aims to give students the opportunity to use all their skills while learning a foreign language, without perceiving the fear of failure. It was developed in the 1980s by a Bulgarian psychologist, Georgi Lozanov, and is based on several techniques that help students to learn a foreign language more quickly and effectively (Rahman 2013:82). Indeed, students may learn 40% more quickly and develop a better sense of self-worth when speaking in a foreign language (Lucantoni 2019:71). When students feel uncomfortable, three different psychological barriers can be identified: the logical-critic barrier, the emotional-intuitive barrier, and the moral-ethical barrier. The aim of Suggestopedia is to remove all these barriers to increase the learning abilities of students and achieve long-lasting results. The basis of this methodology is the combination of brief phases lasting between 15 and 20 minutes, during which the teacher explains, and students are allowed to rest. In this way, students remain focused, their learning difficulties decrease, and their level of interest in the foreign language rises (Lucantoni 2019:71). This way, teachers can

introduce grammar and lexis in a playful manner, using only the target language (Nagy 2019:128).

1.2.2 The Silent Way

Caleb Gattegno, educator and mathematician of Egyptian descent created the Silent Way as a methodology for teaching languages in the early 70s. Using only facial expressions, nods, and finger gestures (also called finger corrections), teachers spend 90% of the lesson instructing and correcting students, and silence is a strategy employed to promote active student participation and autonomy (Rahman 2013:85–86). The Silent Way is a game-like methodology to teaching a foreign language that has been based on careful observation of the mind's workings (Çelik 2014:41). Teachers can actively participate as listeners and observers by keeping an eye on the students and helping them only when necessary. Caleb Gattegno claims that by using this methodology, teachers can work with students, and students can work with the foreign language. The main goal is to promote students' creativity and curiosity about learning a foreign language, and by minimizing the teacher's presence during the lesson, it can be easier to create a relaxed environment for students, without competition and fear of failure (Lucantoni 2019:73).

1.2.3 Community Language Learning

Charles Curran, educator and priest, developed the Community Language Learning (CLL) methodology in the 1970s, which is also known as counselling learning. In a typical CLL class students sit in a circle, and the teacher explains the goal while standing outside. Then students choose what they wish to study. Students should speak in their first language, and the teacher translates what they have said into the foreign language. Every sentence needs to be recorded and transcribed. Students listen to the record, read the transcript, think about their learning, and then openly discuss it with their peers and teachers. In CLL, the teacher is a language expert who also acts as a therapist and encourages students to determine their own learning goals and promotes individual development in group situations (Rahman 2013:84–85). In Community Language Learning classes communication is interactive, and learners need to be given a purpose

for producing language. Thus, simulation games, such as role-play, and drama techniques are often used (Nagy 2019:130).

1.2.4 Total Physical Response

Total physical response (TPR) is a language teaching methodology developed by James J. Asher that encourages learners to listen and answer to the spoken target language commands of their teachers. Teachers give previously prepared orders to students in the foreign language, also using body movements, and students respond with whole-body actions. TPR is based on the coordination of speech and action, of language and physical movement, and it also tries to teach language through physical activity (Rahman 2013:87). This methodology consists of two basic principles: the first, as the name evokes, is the total physical reaction, i.e., the total involvement of the learner in the act of learning. Hence, the learner is at the centre of the learning process, constantly motivated, protected from failure, guided towards self-consciousness and self-realisation. The second principle is word-action coupling, both to produce a total involvement of the learner's expressive means (verbal and non-verbal language) and to enable the so-called four delayed oral practice. This aims to leave enough time between the moment a text is presented for comprehension and the moment the learner is asked to use elements present in the text. Doing this, the so-called silent period of learners, which characterises both the acquisition of the first language and the spontaneous learning of a foreign language, is respected (Chini and Bosisio 2014). This method combines language acquisition with some types of games, such as pointing games (students are ordered to point things or concepts taught by the teacher), role-play, drama and the famous game Simon Says (Rambe 2019:54–55).

1.3 The playful language teaching methodology

The playful language teaching methodology is a particular teaching methodology that consists of teaching languages by using game-based exercises, and it has been found to be particularly effective especially in multi-ethnic contexts (Ceriani 2014:3). It is founded on the humanistic-affective approach and consists of educational paths and language teaching techniques based on games (Caon and Rutka 2004). Indeed, the playful language

teaching methodology shares the same goals with the humanistic-affective approach, as it aims to eliminate learning obstacles such as stress or anxiety, it works on long-term memory and considers learners' emotional involvement (Lucantoni 2019:79).

According to Caon and Rutka (2013:9), the playful language teaching methodology realises, through different types of game-based techniques, the founding principles of the humanistic-affective approach, that can be recognized in five fundamental principles (Caon and Rutka 2013:9):

- ❖ attention to students' communicative needs regarding the psycho-affective and motivational components that influence the learning;
- ❖ importance of languages as instruments of self-expression and social interaction with particular attention to socio-cultural, intercultural, para- and extra-linguistic aspects;
- ❖ idea of learning as a constructive process in which learners must be actively engaged in the construction of their knowledge, which takes place by connecting what is learnt with prior knowledge;
- ❖ awareness and appreciation of the differences between learners arising from their personal history, their social environment, their specific interests, their existential and scholastic objectives, their cognitive and learning styles;
- ❖ concept of teachers' role as learning facilitators rather than just content communicators.

Despite the many prejudices that still exist about this specific methodology by both teachers and students, the use of games encourages learners to deal with language learning in a natural and comfortable way, allowing them to employ all their cognitive, emotive, social, and sensory skills (Luise 2006:183). Therefore, the game-based methodology consists of the transmission of grammatical and lexical contents in the form of games by avoiding learner pressure and promoting student learning. In addition, the wealth of stimuli contained in this type of activity increases not only students' attention, but also their motivation towards the subject studied (Ceriani 2014:3).

As Krashen (1982:66) argues, games encourage learners to use the language for a meaningful purpose, that of playing, meanwhile forgetting that they are learning a foreign

language. Krashen names this concept *rule of forgetting*: “optimal input focusses the acquirer on the message and not on form. To go a step further, the best input is so interesting and relevant that the acquirer may even forget that the message is encoded in a foreign language” (Krashen 1982:66). Therefore, students learn languages by having fun and enjoying themselves. They will put all their skills into action and will be totally involved in the game, which will lead them, for example, to learn new vocabulary. As a result, while students are playing, they will focus on the set goals of the game and use the foreign language to achieve these goals. Thanks to the playful activities, learners are stimulated and have questions that might never be asked by just reading a text or listening to an explanation. For this reason, students will lower their level of anxiety and stress that come from learning a foreign language and work in a favourable environment for a long-lasting learning (Lucantoni 2019:81). Moreover, games trigger another important factor in students, which is challenge. The challenge, indeed, can lead students not only to a greater confidence and awareness of their knowledge, but also to a desire for personal improvement (Ibrahim 2017:141).

Another aspect that should not be underestimated is the strong interpersonal component involved in the game-based methodology. In other words, students will need to collaborate with peers to achieve a common goal, that is, for example in competitive games, winning the game. When applied to a scholastic context, the common will to achieve victory will lead to collaboration among students, teaching them to accept and respect their peers, thus promoting learning from each other (Ceriani 2014:3). Indeed, as Polito (2000:333) argues, games have great educational potential because they help with both learning and sociability.

1.4 Free games and educational games

To better understand the features of the playful language teaching methodology, it is necessary to make an important distinction between free games and educational games; two concepts that are very often confused. Ceriani (2014:6) explains the difference between free games and educational games by defining the words *play* and *game*. *Play* consists of children's daily play through which they learn about their surroundings, activating all their physical and cognitive skills. *Game*, on the other hand, is the actual

game consisting of rules that the player must respect to participate. Educational games belong to the latter category, where teachers set the rules and students, by playing, consciously accept them. Thus, the purpose of educational games is not internal to what is being done, it does not end with the game, but the aim is external and established by teachers (Caon and Rutka 2013:5).

Free games imply psychophysical and cognitive engagement on the part of students, but they have no specific goals outside of it (Ceriani 2014:5). On the other hand, educational games also involve psychophysical and cognitive effort, but unlike free games, they contain specific learning goals (Caon and Rutka 2004). As mentioned earlier, educational games aim to convey lexical or grammatical contents, creating an interactive and engaging atmosphere for learners, and are previously planned by teachers.

Therefore, educational games, which are created and organized by teachers for educational purposes, are proved to be effective mediators in the learning process and in the construction of new knowledge, so that students can acquire new structures and vocabulary through a global and motivated experience. Moreover, educational games will involve students cognitively, but also emotionally, socially, and creatively. This spontaneous integration of intrapersonal and interpersonal spheres proper to this type of methodology can promote the development of social, linguistic-cognitive, and educational skills (Caon and Rutka 2013:5–6).

1.5 The importance of motivation

Motivation is a fundamental aspect in the playful language teaching methodology. Hence, teachers should constantly stimulate their students' motivation and encourage them in the learning process. According to Caon (2020:438), motivation is an essential element for meaningful learning as it lasts in our memory. Caon defines motivation as a *motor* because it etymologically 'moves' us toward an objective, and it also determines intensity and duration of the movement. This aspect is central as it clarifies the necessity to continuously support motivation in students. Moreover, the playful language teaching methodology is "one of the main ways to strengthen student motivation and guide students toward the pleasure of language learning [and] one of the possible solutions to help students develop a passion for learning a new language" (Caon 2020:438).

Dörnyei (1960-2022) developed a three-level model focusing on the image the students have of themselves and the possible future image they would build upon. The possible selves include the students' thoughts that are recognized as long-term goals to reach in their process of second language acquisition. As stated by Dörnyei (2014:521): "From the point of view of learning and teaching, one type of possible self, the *ideal self*, is of particular relevance because it involves the characteristics that someone would ideally like to possess". The *ideal self* is a kind of self-guide because it has a considerable power that allows students to think of themselves in the position they would like to cover in the future. The difference between the actual self, the one that students are experiencing in their present life, and the ideal one encourages students' effort to reduce it. The second type of motivation defined by Dörnyei and related to people is the *ought-to self*, which he defined as "a complementary self-guide that has educational relevance is the ought-to self, which involves attributes that someone believes he or she ought to possess" (Dörnyei 2014:521). This vision deals with personal responsibilities in society to avoid negative future experiences. The *ought-to self* might remind of the ideal position the students would like to reach, but for Dörnyei it is a sense of duty that comes from the outside. Finally, the third image created is that connected to the environment that surrounds students (Dörnyei 2014:521): "This is justified by the observation that for some language learners the motivation to learn a language does not come from internally or externally generated future self-images but from successful *learning experiences*." The *learning experience* consists of specific students' experiences which develop their motivation because of a good environment or a positive impact of teachers.

As recent studies show, students can develop different types of motivation in the foreign language acquisition process. It could be led by a need or pleasure, and it could be based on students' self-image, but it can also change according to the surrounding environment. Caon and Rutka (2004:18) distinguish between two types of motivation: *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation*. *Intrinsic motivation* appears within subjects who find themselves in a context that arouses their interest and curiosity, feeling engaged in activities that are perceived as satisfying. It may happen that initially the intrinsic motivation is not present in learning subjects, and therefore it is teachers' duty to stimulate it. On the other hand, *extrinsic motivation* arises when learners are engaged in activities that have goals outside the activity itself such as, for example, a good mark or teachers' approval.

Another expert on this topic is Kapp (2012) who also agrees with Caon and Rutka's distinction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Kapp continues by explaining that intrinsic motivation comes from three needs of social human beings which are autonomy, competence, and relationality, in which the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is recognized. This theory explains how people can be motivated to perform an activity without external influences. As Kapp (2012:63) says "one of the first elements of SDT is autonomy which is the feeling a person has that they are in control and can determine the outcome of their actions". Hence, *autonomy* is a fundamental aspect in the playful language teaching methodology together with two other elements: *competence* and *relatedness*. According to Kapp (2012:64), competence is motivating because it creates challenging situations in which learners tend to demonstrate their skills as they aim to be recognized as champions. This is strongly related to collaborative games in which players work to reach competence and demonstrate that they have mastered it. Moreover, *relatedness* among other learners and the creation of relationships is not only socially relevant, but it is also a purpose of language teaching. Kapp (2012:64) demonstrates how motivation is fundamental both for games-based activities and teaching methodologies, as he affirms (Kapp 2012:64):

"Researchers have found evidence that the psychological 'pull' of games is largely due to their capacity to engender feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and to the extent they do so they not only motivate further play, but also can be experienced as enhancing physiological wellness."

In conclusion, learners can work on their social needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness and take advantage of them as they are totally involved in the activity. The greatest feature of games is the creation of a positive context in which players are stimulated to pursue their personal improvement in learning and in their social behaviour. Thus, the playful language teaching methodology is founded on the affective-humanistic approach in which students are considered human beings with emotions and fears, and motivation is created upon students' positive emotions and on their entertainment.

1.6 Game base-methodology features and meaningful learning

The playful language teaching methodology has specific features, and by defining them, it will be easier to understand why this type of methodology can lead to meaningful learning. Caon et al. (2013:3) argue that meaningful learning was theorized by three scholars, Carl Rogers, David Ausubel and Joseph D. Novak who, although they expressed their thinking in different ways, defined meaningful learning with very similar characteristics to each other. Indeed, all three scholars argued that this type of learning involves not only experience but all the learner's abilities and has a strong self-motivational and personal component, which makes its effectiveness assessable only by learners. Therefore, it is a global type of learning, as it involves not only cognitive aspects, but also emotional and social aspects, and allows integration of prior knowledge with new knowledge. To better explain the concept of meaningful learning, Caon (2020:442–43) defines three characteristics: meaningful learning is *total*, as it includes the cognitive, affective, emotive, and social sphere; it is a *constructive* process, as it integrates students' prior knowledge with new concepts; the long-lasting learning is influenced by *motivation*, which depends on each student individually.

Thus, the game-based methodology is an excellent strategy to achieve meaningful learning because, as explained by Luise (2006):

- ❖ it ensures a relaxed and playful context to increase students' motivation and attention. By creating this type of atmosphere, learning is much more likely to be effective and meaningful for students by activating all their abilities and offering an engaging learning experience. Moreover, by feeling as an integral part of the activity, students will feel stimulated and, by using all their abilities, will actively participate in the game and thus learn the language;
- ❖ it focuses students' attention on practical actions. Doing an activity with their own hands, such as building or assembling a game, will help them to better remember what was done in class. Thanks to manual experience, it is possible to move on to theoretical explanation while keeping the learners' curiosity alive;
- ❖ it provides a challenge. As mentioned in Section 1.3, challenge is a factor that has great potential in learning. If not overdeveloped and cause of negative behaviours, competition is a rich source of motivation that can stimulate meaningful learning;

- ❖ it can promote integration and collaboration among students. The desire to achieve a common goal, that is winning, motivates students to share their knowledge and cooperate with each other. This will encourage not only meaningful learning but will also be an opportunity for students to realize how much they can learn from each other and win together;
- ❖ it favours interculture. Playing can be an opportunity for students to learn about the cultures of others and, at the same time, reflect on their own culture. Thus, games become a way of knowing one's companion and a source of enrichment, as games themselves reflect the culture to which they belong. This will advance acceptance and respect for peers.

1.7 The role of teachers

To develop meaningful learning in the playful language teaching methodology, the role of teachers is also fundamental. In the game-based methodology, important factors related to the target audience of the games must be taken into consideration. Indeed, teachers should develop their strategy taking in consideration several aspects, including age of students, their communicative needs, their individual interests, and their speed of learning (Caon 2020:444–45). Therefore, whatever teaching methodology is chosen, teachers should act as mediators and, considering the factors concerning learners explained above, put learners at the centre of the learning process. It is on these considerations that teachers must then develop their teaching strategy, trying to create an atmosphere as relaxed and rich in stimuli as possible. In addition, teachers must also be a support for students, helping them to overcome difficulties encountered in learning (Ceriani 2014:10). Based on these considerations, there are many kinds of educational games that teachers can propose to their classes, such as board games, theatre activities, video games, and role-play activities (Ceriani 2014:6). In addition, it is important to remember that educational games can be effective with all age groups (Caon and Rutka 2013:6).

In addition to these basic considerations, to reach and guarantee meaningful learning teachers should consider students' needs, individual interests and possible difficulties when choosing language teaching games (Caon and Rutka 2013:9). Moreover, it is their task to ensure an environment that is stimulating and beneficial to language learning, without resulting in a threatening or overly aggressive environment for students. Hence,

excessive competitiveness could upset the balance of the game by causing a sense of excessive challenge in some students and self-closure in others (Caon and Rutka 2013:9).

As Caon (2020:444) affirms, the role of teachers is also that of “facilitating – through didactic methodology – the process of acquiring an autonomy in critical thought and in the learning strategies by resorting to a metacognitive didactic”. Therefore, teachers must promote their students' critical thinking and not only help them achieve the set linguistic goals. This will promote in students the activation of motivation linked to a sense of duty based on trust and mutual respect. For this reason, Caon refers to the importance of a significant relationship between students and teachers by mediating between two realities; the interests of the students and the learning goals (Caon 2020:445).

1.8 Affinities and differences in games for children, adolescents and adults

Given the frequent and often automatic link of games with childhood, it is important to dispel the myth that games are exclusively for children. The playful language teaching methodology can be adapted and successfully used with adolescents and adults (Caon 2020:449). Indeed, a very common mistake is thinking that the play-based methodology can be used only for children. It is important to overcome this prejudice since educational games, with the right adaptations toward learners, are very effective for foreign language learning even for students in adolescence or adulthood (Caon and Rutka 2013:6).

Ucus (2015:401–4) affirms that educational games promote problem-solving skills and strategic thinking skills, and children's interpretation of the surrounding world through experiences. Hence, games prepare students for social life and society, as they are actors and actresses in the classroom while performing them. Moreover, games provide information in a relevant context or setting and encourage reflection and comprehension of the learning. As games have an important role in children's world, they represent an internal process and natural learning instruments in children's lives. According to the study carried out by Ucus (2015:407) on elementary school teachers' views on game-based learning, the game-based methodology can be applied to several elementary school courses, as it has been found that students feel happy to take part in games and games are suitable for many primary school subjects. Moreover, the results of the study found that

the game-based methodology improves the learning achievements of students and their long-term learning not only in language learning, but also many other disciplines such as maths and science.

On the other hand, as Caon (2020:450) affirms, adolescent students often refuse to participate in game activities as they may be seen cognitively too easy, too infantile or of little significance. Games are perceived by adolescents as typical childish activities and contrast with their new young-adult identities, which are delicate and confused. However, it is possible to use the playful language teaching methodology with adolescents by setting up challenging activities (problem solving or creative activities where their skills are valorised), and promoting discussion and valorisation of their intellectual, personal and/or collective conquests. Hence, as Caon (2020:451) states, exposing students to stimulating activities and assisting them through a meaningful relationship is essential to achieve meaningful learning, develop a sense of self-effectiveness, improve self-esteem, and strengthen social abilities. Thus, educational games for adolescents must be of adequate linguistic complexity, which also means suitable for the cognitive maturity of students, and precisely explained in their learning goals. In this way, educational games can help adolescent students to rediscover the enjoyment of engaging in an activity that is amusing, absorbing, and satisfying.

As mentioned above, the individuality of learners of all ages is essential in the playful language teaching methodology and in the choice of educational games. Following the principles of the game-based methodology, it is essential to focus on the needs and sensitivity of learners to achieve meaningful learning. Therefore, through educational games, teachers will be able to arouse interest and curiosity in adults just as in child or adolescent students (Caon and Rutka 2013:6). It is very important, however, to pay attention to the type of educational games meant for adult-age students, as the perception of games changes with age. Therefore, teachers will have to make a careful assessment of learning rhythms, considering that the needs and requirements of an adult student are quite different from a child or a teenager (Ceriani 2014:8). Thus, games have a great potential in learning a foreign language for learners of all ages. It will result in meaningful learning in adults if the proposed activities present an appropriate linguistic and cognitive level for learners, and the goals and reasons why teachers have opted for a didactic activity of this type are well explained to learners (Ceriani 2014:8). Indeed, games for

adult learners may be perceived as a waste of time or, for example in the case of role-play activities, a threat to their image (Balboni 2015:100). However, if teachers clearly explain their teaching goals, the playful language teaching methodology can also be successful with adults (Caon and Rutka 2013:6).

1.9 Game-based methodology and intercultural education

According to Caon (2020:453), who analysed the playful language teaching methodology and intercultural education, in today's increasingly multicultural educational context, it is important to offer specific pedagogical models that educate students not only to accept and respect diversity, but also to recognize and valorise cultural identities in a context of mutual enrichment.

As Caon affirms (2020:454), intercultural education should be included in all disciplines. However, in this shared search for an intercultural dialogue that is attentive to, respectful of, and interested in difference, language teachers can have a privileged role. Indeed, games that require the frequent use of language present two characteristics that can favour intercultural awareness, as they are (Caon 2020:454):

- a. *trans-cultural*; all children play and share some elements of a universal playful grammar, such as, for example, respect for rules or the ritual of the initial count, regardless of their location or cultural background. As a result, games are activities that promote friendship, contacts, and produce a fair interaction between various sets of knowledge and skills.
- b. *culturally determined*: “a game is a mirror/image of the society wherein it gets developed and every player ‘plays’ (consciously or not) within rules, symbols, aspirations, and fantasies peculiar to his culture” (Staccioli 1998:151 in Caon 2020:454).

Therefore, teachers can use these features of games as a vehicle not only to teach languages, but also to promote intercultural educational values in a playful and communicative context. Dialogue and cooperation arise naturally, and linguistic-cultural understanding is necessary to satisfy the motivation to succeed or the pleasure of challenge typical of games. By pursuing the goal of intercultural education, teachers can find a meaningful context in games' dimension because they imply the

recognition of some implicit trans-cultural values and regulations, such as the respect for rules, and because they encourage students' interaction in a completely natural way by fully absorbing them in the task. Hence, games enable the activation of the cognitive and emotional spheres during the learning process by engaging skills that, in purely verbal communication, would remain unused (Caon 2020:454).

Another aspect not to be forgotten is the combination of the linguistic-communicative objectives of the playful language teaching methodology and the transversal objectives of intercultural education. Indeed, intercultural education aims to promote cultural decentralisation, deconstruction of prejudices, and overcoming xenophobic and racist attitudes. The teachers' goal is to develop playful educational environments that are rich in exchanges, where students' skills are valued and the group benefits from the individual students' prior experiences. Teachers should also need to directly introduce these principles to students by encouraging them to see that discovering otherness is discovering a relation, not a barrier (Caon 2020:455).

1.9.1 Game-based methodology and intercultural education in the Italian school system

Intercultural education has been present in Italian schools for many years. In the "circolare ministeriale" 205/90 of July 26, 1990, which has as subject "La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale" it is explained that:

"l'educazione interculturale (...) va pensata quale risorsa positiva per i complessi processi di crescita della società e delle persone. Pertanto, l'obiettivo primario dell'educazione interculturale si delinea come promozione delle capacità di convivenza costruttiva in un tessuto culturale e sociale multiforme. Essa comporta non solo l'accettazione ed il rispetto del diverso, ma anche il riconoscimento della sua identità culturale, nella quotidiana ricerca di dialogo, di comprensione e di collaborazione, in una prospettiva di reciproco arricchimento."

However, as Ceriani (2014:7) argues, the realization of an effective intercultural education is unfortunately still far in the Italian school system. Therefore, the choice to propose the game-based teaching methodology for foreign languages is an excellent source to promote intercultural education in Italian schools. Hence, as previously

explained, teachers will be able to take advantage of game features not only to achieve linguistic goals, but also to encourage intercultural education. This will also favour dialogue and cooperation among students and convey fundamental values of today's society such as acceptance and respect for the other.

1.10 Games and inclusive learning

The use of games as a teaching methodology can be a form of inclusive education as it can focus on each pupil as a person, unique in his or her needs, and the strengthening of the class group as an active community to create a welcoming and learner-centred context for all students (Berti 2022:65). According to Berti (2022:65), inclusive learning mainly refers to the inclusion of students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Hence, schools should be playful spaces and games should be used as inclusive tools. Indeed, Berti's perspective does not aim to define inclusive games, but rather to recognize that play and games can be inclusive learning tools, and that is why their application in schools is crucial to achieve inclusive education.

Games include various skills and can be an alternative form of learning for students with special educational needs. Learning disabilities are often associated with poor overall educational outcomes and have been the focus of research aimed at gaining a better understanding of the cognitive basis of these problems. Specific learning disabilities in reading, writing or arithmetic are the most common and studied learning disabilities (Lämsä et al. 2018:598). With regard to language learning, dyslexia is the most common learning disability (DiFino and Lombardino 2004:391). According to DiFino and Lombardino (2004:391), dyslexia is a specific type of reading disability that appears to result from difficulties in forming appropriate phonological representations of the sounds of one's language. Many phonologically based skills may be impaired in people with dyslexia, such as manipulating sounds or sound units in spoken language tasks, converting letters into sounds (e.g., pronouncing words), automatically recognizing printed words, repeating unknown sound sequences, and recalling sounds from memory to create words and convert sounds into letters (e.g., spelling words). In addition to dyslexia, there may also be foreign language learning disabilities due to more pervasive language deficits than those observed in students with dyslexia. According to DiFino and

Lombardino (2004:391), these students may have greater difficulties with all aspects of foreign language learning, because their learning is not specifically focused on phonological processing. On the contrary, their difficulties are more conceptual and are often more evident in their understanding of the characteristics of their first language.

DiFino and Lombardino (2004:393) identified three areas that are particularly challenging for all foreign language learners but are particularly problematic for students with language disabilities. They refer to these areas - *memorization, anxiety, and grammar confusion* – as areas of language learning “paralysis”. *Memorization* is an essential part of any form of learning at any level, but it is extremely important for learning and mastering a foreign language. Almost every aspect of language learning, from the first lesson of language classes to the last, requires students to use their memorization skills (e.g., memorizing gender of nouns, meaning of nouns, grammar rules). The effects of poor memory skills are devastating, as they almost always mean poor performance in language classes (DiFino and Lombardino 2004:393). *Anxiety* seems to be common when learning a foreign language and can be extremely damaging to learning when experienced regularly in the classroom. Students have a particular fear of looking ridiculous if they mispronounce foreign-sounding words or make grammatical mistakes. Fear might have such a paralyzing effect on student learning that it can literally stop a student from pronouncing even the briefest sounds in the foreign language. *Grammar confusion* can have a paralyzing effect on foreign language learners, as it inadvertently shifts focus from learning a concept in the target language to understanding what a term means in the grammar scheme. For example, the student might have difficulty understanding the grammar terminology and loses the grammar concept altogether (DiFino and Lombardino 2004:393).

The use of games might be one way to improve the quality of learning for people with learning disabilities and respond to the need for inclusive special education support. According to Lämsä et al. (2018:596), game researchers have recently pointed out that more attention needs to be paid to the use of games in schools as they can strengthen learning in students with learning disabilities. Indeed, there is great optimism about the potential of games to support the learning of people with learning disabilities.

According to the study carried out by Lämsä et al. (2018:596) on games for enhancing basic reading and maths skills for pupils with learning disabilities, the result showed that games have the potential to enhance children's engagement with literacy and maths activities, foster skill reinforcement and empower learners' perceptions of their reading progress (Lämsä et al. 2018:596). Therefore, the results showed that people with specific learning difficulties have positive improvements in the quality of learning using games. As already explained in Section 1.5, learning has cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions in which players engage. For this reason, game-based learning can have a positive impact on students with additional educational needs, as they may be enthusiastic about learning in game contexts, maintaining their motivation to practise skills that are normally difficult to grasp and, in some games, to master skills that require considerable repetition (Lämsä et al. 2018:597).

Lämsä et al. (2018:598) identify several advantages in the use of educational games to support learners struggling with learning disabilities. First, games can support a student's motivation for practicing weak skills for extended periods, which is usually required in the case of learning difficulties (Hersh 2014 in Lämsä et al. 2018:598). Second, the adaptation of the games can help tailor sub-skill and skill level practice, making it the most beneficial for each individual learner's stage of development (Saine, Lerkkanen, Ahonen, Tolvanen, and Lyytinen 2011 in Lämsä et al. 2018:598). Third, games can provide immediate, supportive, and corrective feedback of their performance, which has been shown to be an important element of educational interventions (Rasanen, Salminen, Wilson, Aunio, and Dehaene 2009 in Lämsä et al. 2018:598). Finally, game-based learning can also be cost-effective, as many games can be easily created with simple materials.

In conclusion, games are an excellent methodology for language learning also for students with language learning disabilities and a means of inclusive learning. Indeed, games involve different skills and give these students the opportunity to override their difficulties, to try and learn while having fun. Moreover, due to the repetitive nature that games can take on, students can fix vocabulary or grammar rules, lowering the affective filter and achieving effective learning.

1.11 Evaluation

In the playful language teaching methodology, the proposed activities must be evaluated in relation with the assumptions of this methodology and its principles. As a result, instead of a purely summative and formative assessment, which is an assessment that expresses an overall judgment on the learning achieved by each student, the idea of preferring a self-assessment is increasing. Thus, an assessment in which even the students actively participate by reflecting, thanks to the help of the teacher, on the achieved results, on the difficulties that remain and on those that have been overcome is preferred. Thanks to self-assessment, students feel involved and, above all, become progressively autonomous in acquiring a study method in line with their abilities and needs. This increases students' awareness of their language acquisition and motivates them to the autonomy of self-evaluation (Ceriani 2014:22). In addition, the game environment allows more than one skill to be evaluated at a time, because games activate multiple abilities at the same time. Furthermore, the students' goal is to play, so they act in the foreign language spontaneously, and teachers may observe and evaluate what they have learned in a context free of worry or emotive filters (Caon and Rutka 2004:46).

As McCombs and Pope (in Caon and Rutka 2004) affirm, when students are helped to understand, through personal and educational support, how their minds work and how they can control their thinking processes, their natural abilities to achieve a higher quality of thinking and greater motivation to learn are stimulated. Cognitive self-regulation can initiate a virtuous circle of self-confirmation of one's abilities and be a positive tendency towards ever higher comprehension and functioning. Therefore, evaluation should not only take place at official moments (such as exams, tests and class assignments), but it must be regular, taking into account verbal, non-verbal and relational skills, cognitive development and the acquisition of linguistic functions (Caon and Rutka 2004:47). Therefore, teachers are allowed to schedule evaluation moments, but they must also be able to insert an element of playfulness within the evaluation moments (e.g., peer review of answers), combining the potential of the game with the pre-established objectives and verifying the linguistic and extralinguistic skills that students should have acquired (Caon and Rutka 2004:46–47).

In conclusion, evaluation is an important aspect of the game-based methodology as games create an environment in which students can demonstrate their abilities to their full extent

while being aware of their learning process and capable of avoiding negative emotive filters. Teachers, on the other hand, can evaluate multiple abilities at the same time and observe competencies that are normally unrelated to traditional tests, working as motivators and facilitators in the classroom and creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

CHAPTER II

Language teaching games

In this chapter, I will provide an overview on the organization and classification of language teaching games that can be used in classrooms. Firstly, I will focus on some practical aspects of the organization of games. Secondly, I will look at the classifications of language teaching games. Thirdly, I will discuss the main types of language teaching games and their features. Finally, I will focus on the advantages and disadvantages of competitive language learning.

2.1 Organization of games

Games need to be acceptable for students and include learning objectives in gameplay. Before selecting a game, teachers should think about some practical considerations (Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby 1983:3). First, the time required to organize the activity should be weighed considering what students will acquire in terms of language learning. Second, teachers should think about how the classroom will be organized during the game (for example, will the interactive whiteboard be required?). Third, teachers should decide if the game is acceptable for the entire class or for a specific set of pupils, such as those with more developed or weaker language skills. Moreover, teachers should consider whether it is worthwhile to play a specific game with a certain class or whether a simpler or more complex activity could be used instead. The game should also involve language skills or contents that teachers wish to teach without being perceived as a compulsory activity by students. Therefore, students should not be pressed to participate in the game (Wright et al. 1983:3).

As certain games can only be played in teams, the organization of the game is determined by its structure and the type of work chosen by teachers. Therefore, teachers should also consider how to divide the class in order to play a certain game, which means choosing groups. Thus, teachers should think about what is best for the class and what is affordable. Wright et al. (1983:3) make an important distinction by explaining the advantages of organizing games in groups or pairs. Pair work, indeed, is fast and easy to organize, and it also represents an opportunity for intensive listening and speaking practice. For this

reason, pair work might be a better choice than group work if there are discipline problems in the class. Hence, a large and noisy class, for example, may be divided into pairs rather than groups to prevent discipline issues. On the other hand, group work is essential in games that require four to six players, and if competition is involved, they should be created considering students' skills (Wright et al. 1983:3). Teams or groups can be established the first time the game is played and then maintained throughout the course (Lee 1979:4). This decision should be made by teachers because it may take the entire lesson and result in groups of unequal skills. When there is a group leader, this student will probably be the most skilled speaker, but teachers may opt to assign this role to a reluctant student to make him or her more motivated to play and, consequently, to improve their language. However, there is no evidence that a group leader is essential in educational games, as groups can operate perfectly well without a group leader (Wright et al. 1983:3).

Another key aspect to consider is whether and how to set a score. To guarantee a good and welcoming environment, students should be rewarded if they complete the game successfully but should not be penalised if they do not. In competitive games, for example, students can use the board to keep score and determine the name of their team or group (Lee 1979:7–10).

Teachers should intervene only if necessary during the game (except for process drama, where teachers have an active role in the game). Hence, once groups or pairs are in action, teachers should go from group to group to listen, give their contribution and, only if needed, correct students (Wright et al. 1983:3–4). Students might feel uncomfortable using the language, and any mistake should be discussed at the end of the game. Games require a specific amount of time to be completed, and students may request to play the game again. Teachers may opt to extend the game, but it should be done for a limited period of time as students may get bored. As Wright et al. affirm, the greatest mistake learners might make is not to speak at all. Hence, while some grammatical, phonetic, or idiomatic mistakes may occur during pair or group work, the price is worth paying (Wright et al. 1983:3).

A clear description of the rules is fundamental in the game's process. Indeed, it is essential that students understand what they are supposed to do. If they do not understand the

functioning of the game, they may reject it. If students are feeling particularly uncomfortable while playing the game, they may be assigned alternate duties, such as scoring points. Wright et al. (1983:3–4) offer some practical guidance on the usage of games. They assert that teachers should be well-informed about the games they wish to use in class, and learners should be familiar with the games they are asked to play to minimize difficulties. If teachers intend to teach a new game to their class, it is their task to explain how it works in detail. In the case of new games, it is also recommended to speak in the students' first language to avoid misunderstandings and to achieve success. Teachers might then play the game in front of the class with a small group of students to give a clear example. Moreover, key terms or rules can be written on the blackboard and deleted when the framework of the game is clear.

2.2 Classification and types of language teaching games

Language teaching games are a complex phenomenon and can be divided in several types according to their functioning and goals. Some examples are competitive games, video games, role-playing games; but they can also be classified according, for example, to spaces (if the game can be played in classrooms), organization (if it requires group work or individual work), materials (with or without specific stuff), and so on (Caon and Rutka 2013:13).

Games are considered to be a fundamental feature in children's development, and one of the main tools with which they assimilate reality. Following that, Clapartde suggested the *ontogenetic classification* of games. This classification has been taken up by Piaget (2013), who studied how games underline and inform children's developmental stages in their psycho-affective, cognitive and social growth. Caon et Rutka (2013:14–15) explained the above-mentioned ontogenetic classification of games by dividing games in three categories: exercise games (functional games), symbolic games and rule games. The resulting classification of games and the specific reference to language teaching games should be read functionally rather than chronologically. Moreover, as Piaget (2013) affirms, games do not end in childhood but continue to be fundamental and motivating throughout individuals' lives.

The following tables describe each game category and the language teaching games related to it (Caon and Rutka 2013:14–15).

Table 1

Ontogenetic classification	Types of language teaching games
<p>Exercise games (functional games)</p> <p>Exercise games can be played from the earliest months of life and are related to sensorimotor intelligence. They are games through which children start to explore, exercise new behaviours, experience the surrounding reality shifting from sensory knowledge to the formation of concepts and language. This type of games is characterised by a strong playfulness.</p> <p>In this case, there is no distinction between game and exercise as motivation, interest and pleasure that characterise these games are the same as in free games.</p>	<p>Games that exercise and fix the language structures and vocabulary belong to exercise games:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>repetitions</i> of words, phrases, texts, poems, songs; ➤ <i>compositions</i> of words, phrases, texts, poems, songs; ➤ <i>associations</i> of words-pictures, texts-pictures; ➤ <i>interlocking/pairing</i>, interlocking of lines in a dialogue; ➤ <i>word chains</i>; ➤ <i>movement games</i>; ➤ <i>interviews and questionnaires</i> with very controlled linguistic input; ➤ <i>sequencing games</i>; ➤ <i>problem solving games</i>, why games; ➤ <i>puzzle games</i>: crosswords, crossword puzzles, rebuses, etc.

Table 2

Ontogenetic classification	Types of language teaching games
<p>Symbolic games</p> <p>Symbolic games can be played from the second year of life and are linked to imagination, when children start to attribute symbolic meanings to objects.</p> <p>Symbolic games belong to what Piaget (1978) calls <i>semiotic function</i>, which is the capacity to represent an object or an event that is not present (a signified) by means of another object that is present (a signifier).</p> <p>Symbolic games can be played throughout the individual's life.</p>	<p>Games that involve language and non-verbal languages belong to this category:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>expressive, musical, drama activities, mime activities;</i> ➤ <i>singing activities combined with gestures;</i> ➤ <i>nursery rhymes combined with rhythm and gestures;</i> ➤ <i>transcoding activities, moving from verbal to iconic;</i> ➤ <i>creation of posters, collages, etc.</i> ➤ <i>comic strips;</i> ➤ <i>memory games: memory games, guessing games;</i> ➤ <i>simulation games and role-playing games.</i>

Table 3

Ontogenetic classification	Types of language teaching games
<p>Rule games</p> <p>Linked to the emergence of reflective intelligence and social relations, children begin to play them around the age of seven.</p> <p>These games involve social living, such as sports or intellectual games that imply collaboration, and lead to the discovery of the social rules of language use, and the importance and function of the role of speakers.</p>	<p>Rule games allow students to discover social rules of language use, and the function of speakers' roles. To this category belong:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>communication games</i>; ➤ <i>traditional games</i>, whose rules can be the subject of intercultural analysis (e.g Treasure hunt); ➤ <i>games using graphic grids, diagrams, paths</i> (adapted to language acquisition): e.g. Goose Game, Snakes and Ladders; ➤ <i>naval battle</i>; ➤ <i>dominoes</i> of syllables, of words, of word/phrase pictures; ➤ <i>card games</i>; ➤ <i>Tic-tac-toe</i>: tic-tac-toe solving linguistic questions.

The classification of games provided by Caon and Rutka (2013:16) is, as they affirm, not exhaustive and was intended to provide an exemplification of the wealth of didactic activities involved in the playful language teaching methodology. However, in the teaching unit, it is important to include both exercise games to fix structures and vocabulary, clearly marked by rules, but also symbolic games that develop learner's expressiveness and ability to recall what is not present in the learning environment. Therefore, teachers can select the language teaching games considering the set learning goals and adjust the games to the various stages of the teaching unit. In addition, the game time needs to be determined, and students should be involved as much as possible in playing with the foreign language.

2.2.1 Role-playing games

Role-playing games are game-based activities in which teachers define a context where participants are assigned different roles that students can encounter in the surrounding reality (e.g., waiter and customer). Through role-playing games, social meanings are explored, i.e., the meanings of objects, situations and actions that students are learning (Bonwell and Eison 1991:47). Therefore, role-playing games are simulations, and they are experienced by students as a real game with the advantage of combining words with objects and represent a means by which students can learn relational and cultural models (Zoletto n.d.:3-4-5). As a result, role-playing games can be effective in forcing students to examine their behaviors toward other people and circumstances, experiencing relational and communicative difficulties and reflecting on solutions to overcome them (Bonwell and Eison 1991:61).

As Zoletto (n.d.:11) affirms, teachers should describe in detail the scenario in which the game takes place and assign the participants roles that are different from those they already play in real life. Hence, it is important to create a dynamic context where it is possible to distinguish at least two speakers with their roles, a place and a topic. Moreover, for each situation it is essential to define where it happens (place), when it happens (time), who is involved (people), the relationship between the participants (relationships), and what it is about (topic). The educational advantages of role-playing games are many (Zoletto n.d.:12):

- ❖ on a semiotic level: it links words to facial expressions, gestures and objects;
- ❖ on a psychological level: it is a simulation experienced as a game;
- ❖ on a social level: it teaches social and cultural models.

Another important aspect is timing, as a precise duration needs to be assigned to the game. If the activity lasts too long, teachers should inform participants how much time they have and invite them to finish the game as quickly as possible. On the other hand, if the game is too short, teachers should encourage students to enrich the dialogue by adding jokes or actions (Ceriani 2014:28).

The last phase of the game corresponds to the moment of analysis and discussion of what happened during the role-playing game. The explanation and discussion that follows the game is important to help participants to better understand the real situations by

comparing them with the fictional ones staged and, above all, it helps learners to become familiar with the roles performed and with the foreign language (Ceriani 2014:28).

2.2.1.1 Types of role-playing games

According to Krebt (2017:865), it is possible to distinguish between three types of role-playing games: fully scripted role-playing games, semi-scripted role-playing games, and non-scripted role-playing games. In fully scripted role-playing games, each word is given, and students need to understand and memorize their roles. This first type of games includes explaining the conversation model chosen by teachers and the main aim of the conversation. Byrne (1986 in Krebt 2017:865) claims that these games are suitable for low level students.

The semi-scripted role-playing games include a conversation model with some missing words and students should know how to fill in the blanks with suitable words or expressions. As a result, students can slightly change the main conversation and establish their own conversation. Krebt (2017:865) refers to this type of games as *semi-controlled*, as teachers or textbooks give the language input, but students can construct a conversation by not fully adhering to the text. This type of activity can be used for students with upper beginner to intermediate levels of proficiency, as those students should be familiar with main language features and seek to reach a higher language level of tasks. Indeed, semi-scripted role-playing games are less structured and less controlled than fully scripted role-playing games.

In non-scripted role-playing games, students are given keywords of dialogues and information about the context. This third type is the least controlled and structured task where students establish mini conversations based on keywords, materials or contexts provided as a guide for the conversation. Krebt (2017:866) argues that non-scripted role-playing games provide a great chance to employ students' skills and foster their autonomy in language learning. Davies (1990 in Krebt 2017:866) states that students can employ their opinions and thoughts and establish a language at their level, acting according to their experience. Non-scripted role-playing games can be appropriate for middle to

advanced level students, as this type of games may sometimes demand special skills such as problem-solving.

2.2.2 Process drama

Process drama is a language teaching approach that combines theatre with didactics and uses drama techniques for educational purposes. What distinguishes this method from others, such as role-playing activities that include the creation of semi-real situations and dialogues, is that the entire lesson is developed according to the principle of simulating reality (Maley and Duff 1978:4). In other words, the dramatic activities are no longer isolated elements to be included in a lesson but constitute the entire learning process. Process drama is based on improvisation, and, therefore, improvisation is the main “engine” of the entire play (Pirola 2011:464). Just as in life, also in process drama students deal with unexpected situations. As a result, the use of the second or foreign language becomes fundamental, and students can use the new language they have learnt spontaneously (Maley and Duff 1978:2–3).

According to Priola (2011:465), every process drama activity needs to be launched by a pre-text, which is fundamental to create a good atmosphere, arouse the interest of participants, create dramatic tension, and awaken a group’s creativity and imagination. This is a crucial moment on which the success of the entire drama may depend. Pre-texts can be of different types, such as myths, short stories, novels, and plays. Although the content of process drama lessons is improvised and is the result of cooperation between participants, the structure of the activity needs to be planned before the lesson. The plot outline should be chosen by teachers considering several fundamental elements, such as the students’ age, their language skills, and the learning objectives (Pirola 2011:465).

A further distinctive element of process drama is to be found in the figure of the teacher. In this type of language teaching game, the role of teachers differs considerably from traditional language classes. Pirola (2011:464) speaks of *teacher in role* who takes full part in drama activities, stepping into the shoes of one or more of the main characters of the drama played in the classroom. Therefore, it is possible to consider process drama as a game that shifts the roles and dynamics of the classroom, and where teachers abandon

their desks to join students on stage in an imaginary theatre. Indeed, Kao and O'Neill (1998 in Pirola 2011:464) define the relationship between participants in process drama horizontally, since they all live and interact in the same fantasy world created in the classroom. Moreover, teachers, by performing and identifying with a character, represent an invitation for students to actively take part in the play (Pirola 2011:465). Hence, teachers are considered to be one of the best ways to start drama, as they can set up an exercise of empathy and create dramatic tension in the class from the very first moment. For this reason, teachers in process drama play many roles: language experts, actors, directors, and scriptwriters performing with students who become actors, directors, scriptwriters and learners, involved in the story they are creating (Piazzoli 2018 in Saccuti 2018:79).

As Maley and Duff (1978:5) claim, the recreation of environments, even if in a symbolic way, can be of great help for students' involvement. Indeed, a clear and defined context is very important to guarantee students' identification in their roles and, for this reason, it is always necessary to specify to the class the place and time where the story is happening. Hence, for the success of the drama, teachers need to think about how to manage the space in class (Pirola 2011:473).

The presence of an adequate number of participants is also fundamental for a great performance of process drama. Pirola (2011:473) explains that it is recommended to work with 10 or maximum 15 students, otherwise it would be difficult to carry out some activities. Moreover, coordination and work management issues would arise in a class that is too large. Piazzoli (2018 in Saccuti 2018:83) does not recommend using process drama with students below B1 level. Indeed, a B2 language level is recommended to ensure the functioning and success of the game. For lower levels such as A1, drama techniques for language teaching can certainly be used, such as play reading.

In conclusion, process drama can be considered a useful teaching method for learning English as a foreign language, as it allows learning through performing. Through the dramatization of scenes, participants use the language in a more spontaneous and fluent manner, acquire greater skills and develop greater confidence with the foreign language. As a result, students feel freer in using the foreign language since they do not fear the

mistakes they may make. Indeed, even if they would make a mistake, it would occur within what they consider to be a game (Maley and Duff 1978:8–9).

2.2.3 Video games

Several researchers have highlighted the potential of video games in foreign language learning. According to Krashen (1994 in Chen and Yang 2013:130), it seems that video games can provide language input to learners as they can facilitate vocabulary learning and the development of various language skills. The dialogues performed by game-characters and the game instructions in the foreign language can create an authentic learning environment for language learners. However, this new type of learning environment is very different from traditional language classes as many of the learning opportunities, such as the presentation of new vocabulary items, are provided in a more implicit way (Chen and Yang 2013:130).

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of video games on second and foreign language acquisition. An example is deHaan (2005 in Chen and Yang 2013:129) whose study investigates Japanese acquisition as a second language through a baseball video game. The results showed that learners improved their language skills in reading and listening. Other studies found that video games can provide context-rich, cognitively engaging virtual environments for second and foreign language learning. Ranalli (2008 in Chen and Yang 2013:130) investigated the impact of the well-known video game *Sims* on foreign language vocabulary learning (in this case English) and showed that participants made statistically significant improvements in their vocabulary knowledge.

It is important to make a distinction between video games that have an educational purpose and those that are meant just for entertainment. McFarlane and Kirriemuir (2004 in Guerrero 2011:56) have distinguished between mainstream digital games and learning-oriented games, which they define as *edutainment*. The former is the type of game that is developed by major entertainment firms for amusement and profit. These video games are typically played on specialized and well-known gaming consoles such as Nintendo, PlayStation, and X-Box, and their goals are marketing-driven and not educational. On the other hand, “learning-oriented games have adapted the original idea of video games in

order to present content in an enjoyable manner” (Guerrero 2011:56). Thus, video games that can be provided in classrooms are what is defined as *edutainment*, i.e., educational video games designed for learning purposes that meet the needs of education and entertainment.

According to Chen and Yang (2013:130), there are several types of video games for language learning, such as platform games, computer simulation games, strategy games and adventure games. Therefore, the amount of edutainment software that teachers can use in the classroom as language teaching tools is increasing. Video games allow exercises and activities that can be easily played several times and can also provide automatic correction. Hence, educational video games can be a source of interest for students and allow them to deal with the foreign language without pressure (Turkay et al. 2014:4–5).

Kozlova (2021) claims that educational video games support meaningful learning by providing:

- ❖ a strong and engaging narrative (context): video games provide excellent context by telling a powerful and entertaining story. In general, video games present an engaging narrative in which the player is encouraged to participate;
- ❖ purposeful interactions (authenticity): in video games, intrinsic motivation to communicate in a relevant setting is provided;
- ❖ emotional engagement (motivation): video games are excellent at using the narrative, the challenges, and the rewards to create an emotional reaction that is closely related to motivation;
- ❖ freedom to fail (mistakes): video games are excellent opportunities to practice the foreign language. The freedom to fail is essential in language learning, as each mistake will result in a language input closer to the solution, rather than losing points;
- ❖ opportunities for independent decision making (learner autonomy): in video games, the process of independence is promoted. Players need to find solutions to tricky situations, always return to the starting point and start all over again to progress in the game. In the process, players not only develop their curiosity, but

also problem-solving skills and self-confidence, the benefits of which extend into the classroom and beyond.

In conclusion, video games have the advantage of supporting students in learning the foreign language, for example in fixing linguistic structures and vocabulary. Their multimedia and interactive features involve learners and stimulate their curiosity, leading them to use and assimilate the foreign language. Therefore, due to their repetitive nature, they can be useful for revising e.g., grammatical structures or vocabulary even for students who already have advanced language skills (Guerrero 2011:56–57).

2.2.4 Board games

Board games have a central role not only in improving language and communication skills, but also in many different contexts from improving early vocabulary to developing sophisticated grammar and discourse skills (O’Neill and Holmes 2022:74). Studies show that children's early vocabulary and their discourse skills, such as, for example, engaging in a conversation or telling a story, can be encouraged by playing researcher-developed and commercial board games. In the field of speech pathology, commercial board games are recognized as a means to further develop these skills. In addition to other toys and play activities, speech therapists use commercially available board games to improve children's language and communication skills and to achieve specific goals in intervention and therapy with children (O’Neill and Holmes 2022:72).

Board games can also be applied to foreign language acquisition, as they can be a way for students to practice a new language in a low-risk, fun environment. The key features of board game play can align with and support the learning process of a language, helping to create a friendly atmosphere. Students in language learning classes need to feel free to take risks, make mistakes, be creative in practicing new words and phrases, and feel psychologically comfortable and safe in their learning environment (O’Neill and Holmes 2022:72). There are several reasons why board games meet these goals. First, the vocabulary and discourse tend to be more limited and easier to understand and can reduce players' fear of speaking in an unfamiliar language. Second, the board game play supports turn taking, which gives all players the opportunity to speak, and creates repetitions that make players hear expressions and vocabulary multiple times. Third, board games can

encourage both collaborative problem solving and experimentation with new language structures and vocabulary related to the game (Smith 2006 in O’neill and Holmes 2022:72).

According to Wu et al. (2014:212) the construction and organization of board games are suitable for language classrooms. A common board game usually depicts a game world with a game board, illustration cards, a text description as a rule book, and some game features (Chen et al. 2011 in Wu et al. 2014:212). Board games, like other games, are often designed for social contexts, so they can be used in classrooms to enrich the linguistic input. Recently, board games are increasingly being used for educational purposes (Wu et al. 2014:212).

As Karasimos (2021:5) affirms, there are many types of board games. They can range from no specific theme like checkers to a central theme and narrative like Cluedo. Rules can be very simple, such as in tic-tac-toe, or more complex like those describing a game universe in detail, as for example in Dungeons & Dragons. The time needed to learn how to play a game differs from game to game, but it is not necessarily related to the number or complexity of the rules; games like chess or Go have relatively simple rules but great strategic depth. There are several ways board games can be classified. However, there is no globally recognized classification system for board games (Karasimos 2021:6).

The key to success or failure in using games in a foreign language class is the selection of a suitable board game adequate for students’ needs and capable of activating students’ participation. According to Karasimos (2021:6), board game selection is based on three elements: *age recommendation and appropriateness*, *time factor* and *language factors*. First, age recommendation and appropriateness are two of the three minimum required symbols (with duration and number of players) on each board game box. Therefore, board games that meet the minimum recommendations of the designers and publishers should be chosen. This is based on the difficulty of the board game and depends on skills such as memory, speed, flexibility, attention, comprehensibility, and problem solving. Second, time is fundamental when choosing a board game to be played in classrooms, as duration depends on the time available. Third, language level is essential, as it needs to be suitable for the target classroom. Thus, games that are too difficult may dramatically increase the

complexity of the lesson and students may feel insecure, anxious, and overwhelmed (Karasimos 2021:6–7).

Recently, advances in electronics and networking have made it possible to apply board games to various digital platforms such as websites, tablets, and digital desktop devices. Digitized board games like Scrabble, Carcassonne, Apples to Apples, and Stone Age have connected players in a vast network to play together. In school applications, tabletop technology is also regarded as a good application tool to use board games for language learning, math learning, and science learning (Wu et al. 2014:213). Wu et al. (2014:213) designed a digital board game for language learning and conducted a study to investigate how board game playing mechanics enrich learning materials with relevant contexts and create a knowledge-in-use opportunity in classrooms. According to the results of the research, the students that used a digital task-collaborative board game platform achieved significantly better communication skills compared to those learning in a regular classroom. Moreover, the digital learning playground was also helpful for the students by encouraging them to speak through play (Wu et al. 2014:224).

2.2.5 Competitive games

Competition is one of the possible ways teachers can motivate their students in the learning process. Competition arises when one student achieves a specific goal that other students fail to achieve (Johnson & Johnson 1991 in Rooswinkel 2014:3). In competitive games, all students try to achieve the same goal, which could be for example making the fewest mistakes and scoring the most points. As Rooswinkel (2014:3) states, competition is one of the elements that make games fun.

Some scholars consider competition a dispensable game element, while others consider it an essential game feature. Competition has been defined in many ways and has several traits. Many scholars define competition as individuals or groups competing with each other to reach a defined goal pursued by a strong motivation (Vandercruysse et al. 2013:928). The complexity of competition refers to the different forms that competition can take. One possible form distinguishes between individual and group play: in individual competition everyone is an autonomous player, whereas group competition consists of groups of players competing against each other. Another aspect by which

competition can be classified is the distance between players: face-to-face team competition (one player against each other sitting side by side), reduced proximity team competition (two competing teams playing not close to each other but knowing who the opponents are) and anonymous team competition (not knowing who the rival is) (Vandercruysse et al. 2013:929).

Competition is said to have positive effects because it is related to challenge, and challenge in turn has been associated with intrinsic motivation. Indeed, competition provides an additional challenge that leads to greater attention and excitement or improved motivation to learn, engagement and interest, challenge, interactivity, more collaborative work within groups, and active participation. Thus, defining competitive elements as adding points may focus players on the game and increase motivation. Hence, viewing points on the blackboard can, for example, strengthen a student's belief that the task is worth the effort (Vandercruysse et al. 2013:929).

On the other hand, overemphasizing a score can lead students to over-rely on the scores and become less engaged with the study materials. Consequently, adding a score can undermine rather than support motivation and learning. In line with this, Van Eck and Dempsey (2002 in Vandercruysse et al. 2013:929) note that competition may not promote learning because competition assumes that students will not reach their maximum level of achievement. In other words, competition can only be effective if there is still room for improvement, which is more likely if help or support is available to students (e.g., a teacher). In addition, in competitive games students are exposed to social comparison that can affect a student's beliefs about self-efficacy, which in turn is related to motivation and achievement. Especially for students with low self-efficacy and beginners, competition can interfere with their performance, make them feel depressed, frustrated, or inferior, or cause them tension, anxiety, and pressure, resulting in decreased achievement (Vandercruysse et al. 2013:929). Moreover, there are always winners in competitions, but there are also losers. If a student keeps losing despite doing everything in their power to win, there can have negative effects on the student. He or she may find the competition unfair and may not want to participate in other competitive learning tasks in the future. In addition, if a student is consistently losing, the defeat can have a negative impact on the student's confidence or lead to bullying from the rest of the class (Rooswinkel 2014:4).

In conclusion, competition might be used in language education to add some fun to learning. Learning is usually associated with being obligatory and boring, so competitive games give the opportunity to teachers to add excitement to their classes and motivate their students to do things they would not initially be interested in. However, when competition is used in language teaching, it is very important that each student has a fair chance of winning the game (Rooswinkel 2014:4). Moreover, in case of group work, it is important to create balanced groups where the more able learners can support the less able learners of their group. It is also crucial that students contribute equally to the learning experience to reduce the risk of some students relying on the more skilled students, which might occur in a traditional classroom study group. To achieve a successful outcome for all students in a competitive language learning group, it is important that everyone contributes equally to ensure that the group is greater than the sum of its parts and achieves better academic performance (Creighton and Szymkowiak 2014:156).

2.3 Advantages and disadvantages of competitive language learning

The question of whether there are advantages or disadvantages to competition in language learning has been the subject of several discussions. Some scholars claim that it helps students develop language skills; others argue that it ruins the atmosphere in the class. This section discusses the pros and cons of competition in language learning.

One of the main advantages of competition in language learning is that it can create an environment in which students push each other beyond their normal limits, which can lead to improved performance both individually and as a class. When individual performance increases, so does the performance of all students in the class, who want to outdo each other (Butera, Świątkowski, and Dompnier 2021:23–26). Moreover, competition can also lead to positive results by increasing students' engagement, enhancing students' achievement, and facilitating their creativity. Competition can be rewarded with bonuses or other types of prizes and can be beneficial for students, as it can stimulate a commitment to self-improvement. Although rewards and bonuses can stimulate competition, competition can be an opportunity to develop self-improvement. Self-improvement can include actions such as changing study habits to be more organised

and visualising goals to keep motivation high. Moreover, not all competitions need to be at an individual level. Competition can lead to teamwork in the classroom, when students are divided into groups and asked to compete against each other. This can lead to several positive outcomes when students work together. For example, students can help each other by compensating for their weaknesses in teamwork and form a stimulating and collaborative environment (Butera et al. 2021:23–26).

Despite the advantages, competition in language learning can also present some potential problems. The first disadvantage that can be noted is that competition can to some extent create boundaries between students in the class. The fact that some students may desire the first place in any competition over others may create an uncomfortable learning environment in which energy takes over from politeness. According to Butera et al. (2021:26–29), this type of behaviour may become an issue in the use of competition in language learning, as some learners may simply want to perform better than others to win the competition. Indeed, the possibility of increasing the gap between students of different levels can be considered a problem of competition in learning. Hence, the improper use of competition in language learning may have a negative impact on students. Due to the different learning experience of winners and losers in competitive games, students may feel anxious and inferior when they fail in the game. The result might be that some students might not want to participate in the activities because of weak language skills or fear. For this reason, it is very important that the competition is fair and that everyone has a good chance of winning the challenge. If the friendly atmosphere in which learners play is destroyed, there will be no real improvement in foreign language learning (Butera et al. 2021:26–29).

The study conducted by Liu, Zhou, Li, and Ye (2022:11) examined the effects of competition and inter-group competition on students' learning effect and motivation to learn in a game-based English vocabulary learning environment. A group of 79 sixth graders from China were randomly assigned to a non-competitive class, an individual competitive class, and a group competitive class (Liu et al. 2022:1). The experiment was conducted in an English vocabulary course, and the game competition was conducted via the gaming platform Quizlet Live. The study found that competition in game-based learning had a positive impact on language learning and student motivation. Students in the competitive class had better English vocabulary learning results and higher motivation

to learn than students in the noncompetitive class. The study also found that students in competitive settings, in group collaboration, and in the competitive class between groups had better learning effects than students in the individual competitive class. This showed that in the playful English vocabulary learning environment, the intra-group collaboration and the competitive mode between groups can have a positive impact on the learning effect of the students.

The study carried out by Vandercruysse, Vandewaetere, Cornillie and Clarebout (2013:927) examined whether the addition of the game element competition to a computer-based language learning environment was related to student motivation, perceptions, and learning outcomes. In addition, this study examined the effect of instruction, i.e., teaching in a play or learning environment, on students' perception of the environment, their motivation and learning outcomes. The study involved 83 students, all working in a gamified learning environment to learn business English conversation skills. The results showed that competition was related to student progress and motivation. In addition, most students perceived the environment as a learning environment, even when instructed to play in a game environment. Moreover, students in the competitive environment reported higher perceived competence, greater effort invested, and higher task value (Vandercruysse et al. 2013:944).

According to Butera et al. (2021:26-30), competition in education can be a valuable element, but it must be integrated into the classroom under specific conditions. Firstly, teachers must properly organise the activities that include competition. Indeed, it is crucial that each student has a good chance of winning the challenge, whether in individual or group work. If students do not feel that they have enough ability to win, they may probably not want to participate in such activities in the future. Secondly, activities that include competition must be carefully prepared and adapted to the class in which they will be used. If the activities are too easy or too difficult, students may lose interest and not achieve any improvement in learning. Thirdly, students must be rewarded if they win the competition, but not penalised if they fail. Hence, if these conditions are met, competition can intervene positively and effectively in the classroom.

In conclusion, whether competition in language learning is a positive way to develop new knowledge and learners' skills depends on how well and properly organised it is. If

competition is properly structured, satisfactory results can be achieved. Moreover, competition should not be a place of discrimination or threat, but an encouragement to participate in the activity and to reinforce new knowledge. In addition, in the case of teamwork, competition can be a means of developing cooperation between classmates. These considerations are crucial for competition to be effective in learning and provide the basis for the research project described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

Teaching activity in a primary school: a case study

In this chapter, I will provide an overview on classroom research and games in action research projects. Then, I will explain my own research conducted on the use of competitive games in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in primary school describing in detail the games proposed to the class, the structure of the lessons and the organization of the games in the classroom.

3.1 Classroom research

Classroom research, which is also known as action research, is a type of research that focuses on language teaching. Its purpose is to understand what is happening in the classroom and why, in relation to teaching and learning (Allwright and Bailey 1991:1). Hopkins (2014:1) defines classroom research as “an act undertaken by teachers to enhance their own or a colleague's teaching, to test the assumptions of educational theory in practice, or as a means of evaluating and implementing whole-school priorities”. Action research is becoming increasingly popular in English language teaching as a means of continuous professional development (Edwards and Burns 2016:6).

Action research is conducted by teachers in their own classrooms or in the classrooms of their colleagues. As Edwards and Burns (2016:6) explain, action research means that teachers act, often in the form of an intervention, to systematically investigate a problem in the classroom through research that they believe is worth investigating to improve some aspect of classroom teaching or learning. They look critically at what is happening to improve it or to test some theoretical assumptions. Classroom research is one way in which teachers can take more responsibility for their actions and create a more dynamic environment in which to teach and learn. The research can be institution-wide, involving the whole school, more than one school, or it can be carried out by a single teacher in their own classroom (Hopkins 2014:42).

Classroom research covers a wide range of different studies, ranging from simple observation to more controlled experiments, but the focus is always on the classroom. It is the collection and analysis of data to describe what happens during language classes.

The research can be conducted in several ways: direct observation, questionnaires, recordings (audio and video), diaries, and discussion with the subjects involved. The discussion can take the form of an interview, such as with pre-arranged questions, or it can arise spontaneously, with the people involved freely expressing their opinions. When teachers choose to conduct interviews, they need to think carefully about the structure and wording of the questions. Therefore, it could be pointed out that they forced the answers, i.e., they got certain answers just because of the way they have asked questions (Allwright and Bailey 1991:4).

In action research, evaluation can be carried out on a large or small scale. Tomlinson (1998:215–16) distinguishes between micro and macro-evaluation, where micro-evaluation is an evaluation of a specific teaching-learning task or a specific methodological technique or perhaps an entire lesson. A micro-evaluation is characterized by a narrow focus on a specific aspect of the curriculum or administration of the program. On the other hand, macro-evaluation is the evaluation of complete textbooks, entire courses or projects. Thus, a macro-evaluation is an evaluation conducted for accountability and/or developmental purposes by collecting information on various administrative and curricular aspects of the program, including teaching materials (Tomlinson 1998:2015–16).

Hopkins (2014:4–5) asserts that action research has two main goals: improvement and participation. It aims to increase understanding of the practice and the situation in which the practice takes place. In addition, teachers are personally involved in this process as the researchers are usually the teachers themselves. The search can also be carried out by an external researcher; however, the teacher's involvement remains the same as it is part of what the researcher observes and evaluates. Action research usually follows a cycle: planning, acting and observing, reflecting and planning again. Indeed, aspects that were not considered at the beginning can come into play in the empirical study. Consequently, the teacher-researcher can think about new aspects and decide to do further research.

Action research belongs to qualitative research. This research usually focuses on the quality of the data collected rather than the quantity. It can be related to an individual case and is particularly suitable for evaluating social situations, such as language lessons.

Indeed, social situations are extremely difficult to assess quantitatively (Allwright and Bailey 1991:67).

Allwright and Bailey (1991:65) argue that there are some considerable differences between qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research evaluates the phenomenon in its natural environment, not in an artificial situation. It aims to describe what is happening from the perspective of those involved. Quantitative research, on the other hand, tries to create a description based on given categories. Qualitative research is usually small-case research, while quantitative research often focuses on large settings or groups of individuals. While qualitative research uses a wide range of different methods to assess the phenomenon from different perspectives, quantitative research tends to be based on a single perspective. The results of the quantitative research are essentially presented quantitatively. Qualitative research, on the other hand, uses quantification only when appropriate. The choice of using qualitative or quantitative research depends on the type of study conducted and the phenomenon evaluated (Allwright and Bailey 1991:65).

3.1.1 Games in classroom research projects

Recently, some classroom research projects have been conducted on games. One of these is the study conducted by Dewi et al. (2016:63) on the use of communicative games to improve students' speaking skills in English as foreign language. They describe an action research project carried out in Jakarta, Indonesia, with the help of other English teacher-researchers. The aims of the study are to find out whether communicative games have an impact on teaching speaking skills and to describe how communicative games influence middle school students' speaking skills. Communicative games are a set of fun designed activities that can stimulate student interaction in the classroom. These games require students to actively participate in class by speaking and writing to express their point of view or provide information (Dewi et al. 2016:64). The procedures used were planning, acting, observing and reflecting. It was conducted in two cycles, each cycle consisting of three meetings. The survey instruments were interviews, direct observation, questionnaires and tests. The tests were only given to students, whereas the rest of the survey instruments were meant for both teachers and students. The results of the study showed that communicative games have a positive impact on the teaching-learning

process and students' speaking skills. It also revealed that communicative games increased students' enthusiasm, motivation, active participation, confidence, and fluency. In conclusion, Dewi et al. (2016:63) showed that communicative games create an enjoyable environment and reduce the monotony and stress of the learning process.

Huyen and Khuat (2003:90) conducted an action research project in Vietnam together with other teacher-researchers to assess whether games help students learn vocabulary in English as a foreign language. Huyen, Khuat and their teacher-research colleagues started with the idea that learning vocabulary usually means memorizing a list of words provided by teachers or included in textbooks. Students learn words in the context in which they are presented, disregarding other nuances of meaning, their use and frequency in real-world communication events. Therefore, the teacher-researchers believed that this method was unproductive in language learning. Because of this, they decided to test different strategies: they focused on games to see if they were useful tools. For two weeks, they played different types of vocabulary games with their students, created post-class questionnaires, wrote reflections on the classes in their journals, and interviewed other teachers. The research included the use of games in their language classes, observing other teachers' classes, and interviewing both teachers and learners to investigate students' reactions, feelings and the effectiveness of games in vocabulary learning. The collected data showed that students effectively learned vocabulary through games. According to Huyen and Khuat (2003:103), games are useful activities and effective tools to use in vocabulary teaching and learning. Although the short time frame made it difficult to precisely assess the students' achievements, the students affirmed that they enjoyed playing the games and that the activities helped them improve their vocabulary building skills.

3.2 Classroom research project in a primary school

The qualitative research I conducted concerns the use of competitive games for teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The evaluation collected data on the practical use of games, e.g., what aspects the teacher needs to pay attention to, what problems can arise when using games in the classroom; opinions and attitudes of students regarding games; and the teacher's perspective on games. Games were tested to see if they were valuable classroom activities that could have a positive impact on language teaching and learning. As qualitative research uses a wide range of different methods to obtain results (Allwright and Bailey 1991:65), the methodologies to collect data were direct observation, personal journal, students' questionnaire, and interview with the English teacher, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

In the first part of the project, I contacted a school willing to participate in the research and arranged appointments with the English teacher who was going to take part. Several meetings were held with the English teacher to plan the lessons and the organisation of the games. During the meetings with the teacher, I was provided with the class textbook, and we discussed the topics covered during the year and the students' level of English. The topics covered during the year were weather, seasons and months, school subjects, daily routine, physical description, natural places, and wild animals. According to the teacher, the language level of the class was A1. In the second part of the project, following the information given by the teacher about the program and the students' language level, I devised the games proposed in the next section. The level of the games was decided together with the teacher, who explained to me what she considered too easy or too difficult for the students. However, the teacher allowed me to freely choose the games to play and how to organize them.

Games were carried out in two lessons for a total of three hours in class 4B at Saletto Primary School. The class consisted of nineteen students, who were divided into four teams. The teams were decided by the English teacher and were maintained for both lessons to ensure a competitive environment and avoid wasting time. To create balanced teams, the teacher decided how to form the teams according to the language skills of the students. In order for all students to work equally, no group leader per team was

established. Each team could then decide on its own name. The four teams were named: *Boom*, *Flash*, *I Geni* and *Isola degli Animalì*.

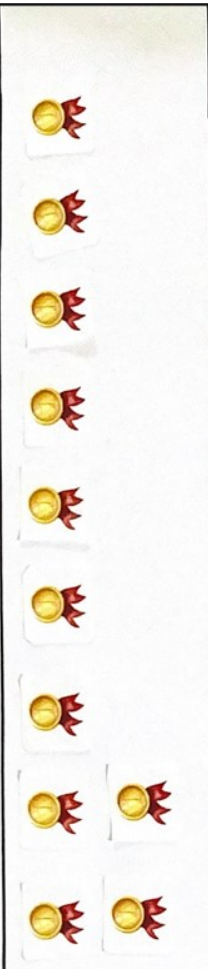
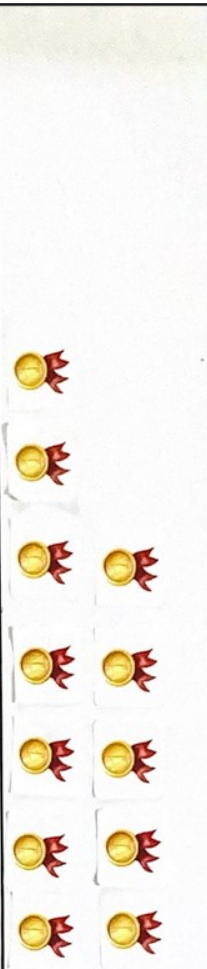
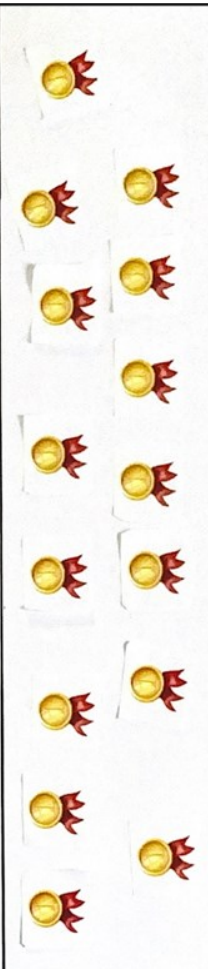
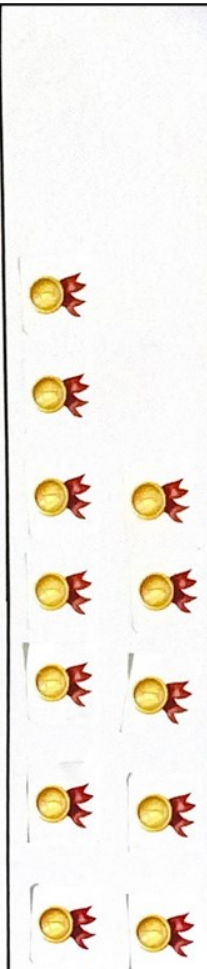
During the games, every time a team scored a point, a token was given (see Figure 1). A token was a small piece of paper representing a medal that symbolised the points that the teams gained during the games.



Figure 1: token

At the end of each game, the tokens were added up and glued to the scoreboard (see Figure 2). The team with the most tokens won the game. At the end of the second lesson each team's tokens were counted. The team that won the most tokens during the two lessons won the whole competition. Although at the end of the second lesson the teams were almost equal, the team *I Geni* collected more tokens during the games and won the entire competition. Each student of the class was awarded a prize for participation and effort consisting of a packet of coloured modelling dough.

Figure 2: Scoreboard

SCOREBOARD	
BOOM	
FLASH	
I GENI	
ISOLA <small>DEI</small> ANIMALI	

The aim of the games was vocabulary learning. All vocabulary used in the games was taken from the class textbook. The lessons addressed two distinct categories of vocabulary: physical description, clothing, and accessories in the first lesson, and wild animals in the second lesson. The topics were already covered by the students during the school year and were agreed in advance with the English teacher. Therefore, all games were based on vocabulary which students were familiar with. New vocabulary items were sometimes introduced to make the lessons more interesting, but the games did not require students to study in advance. To avoid misunderstandings due to the language level of the students, the explanation of each game was provided in Italian. The next section deals with the description of the games proposed in the research.

3.2.1 Language teaching games for English as FL

The games carried out in the class were *The guessing game*, *Find the intruder* and *Who's the famous person?* in the first lesson, and *Wild crossword puzzle*, *Word scramble*, *Hangman*, *Connections*, and *Word-race* in the second lesson. During the games, students were allowed to use their textbook and English notebook.

The Guessing Game

Language: making statements about others using physical description, clothing, and accessory vocabulary

Skills: Writing

Control: Guided

Level: Beginners

Time: 30-40 minutes

Materials: Paper, pencils, and a box

Procedure: Each student writes their name on a piece of paper, then the names are placed in a box and mixed up. Students are divided into four teams. They take a card from the box and write a description of the person named on the card using the third person

singular. Students must write in English. After 10-15 minutes, one team reads the prepared description aloud while the other teams try to guess who he/she is. Students are asked to use vocabulary related to the physical description, clothing, and accessories and to construct sentences such as (Bertarini, Huber, and Iotti 2017:53):

She's tall. She's young and slim. She has got brown hair and a ponytail, and she's got glasses. She wears a pink jumper.

He's short and slim. He's young. He's got curly red hair and freckles. He hasn't got glasses. He wears a yellow t-shirt.

The team that guesses the name of the student described gets one token and reads in turn the description prepared. The game is adapted from Wright et al. (1983:73) and the class textbook (Bertarini et al. 2017:52).

Who wins: Each correct answer corresponds to one token. The team that first manages to guess all the names or guesses as many names as possible, and thus scores the most tokens, wins the game.

Find the intruder

Language: Physical description, clothing, and accessory vocabulary. Critical thinking game. Acquisition of the concept of category and belonging/non-belonging

Skills: Reading and comprehension

Control: Controlled

Level: Beginners

Time: 10 minutes

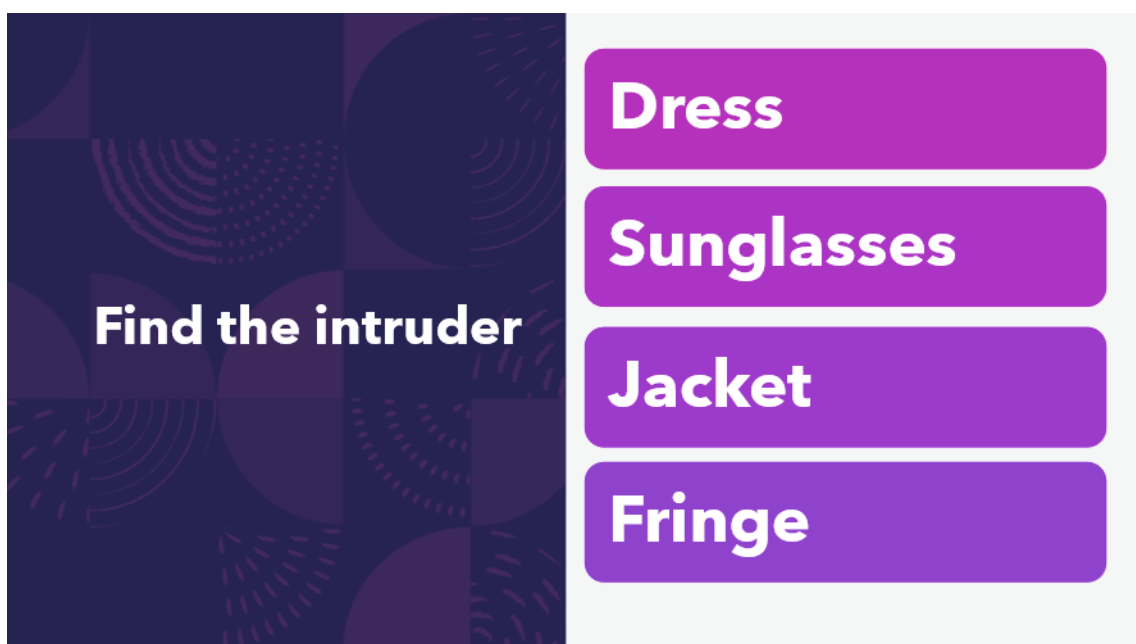
Materials: Cards with sets of terms regarding clothing, accessories, and physical description. Each card includes an intruder (see Figure 3).

Procedure: Students play in teams and are shown cards containing a series of terms from physical description, clothing, and accessory vocabulary in English. Each card contains

an intruder, i.e., a word that does not belong to the category presented. Whoever manages to discover the hidden term first earns a token for his/her team.

Who wins: The team that first manages to find all the hidden words or finds the highest number of intruders in each set of terms wins the game. Therefore, the team with the most tokens wins the game.

Figure 3: Find the intruder





Scarf Gloves
Freckles Socks



T-shirt
Hat
Shoes
Beard

Find the intruder

Umbrella

Boots

Ponytail

Skirt

Find the intruder

Trousers

Moustache

Dress

Jumper

Find the intruder

Curly hair

Shorts

Hat

Swimming costume

Find the intruder

Watch

Fringe

Shoes

Jumper

Find the intruder

Jumper

Dress

Jeans

Lips

Find the intruder

Ginger hair

T-shirt

Jacket

Jeans

Find the intruder

- T-shirt
- Socks
- Green eyes
- Boots



Who's the famous person?

Language: making statements about others using physical description, clothing, and accessory vocabulary

Skills: Speaking

Control: Guided

Level: Beginners

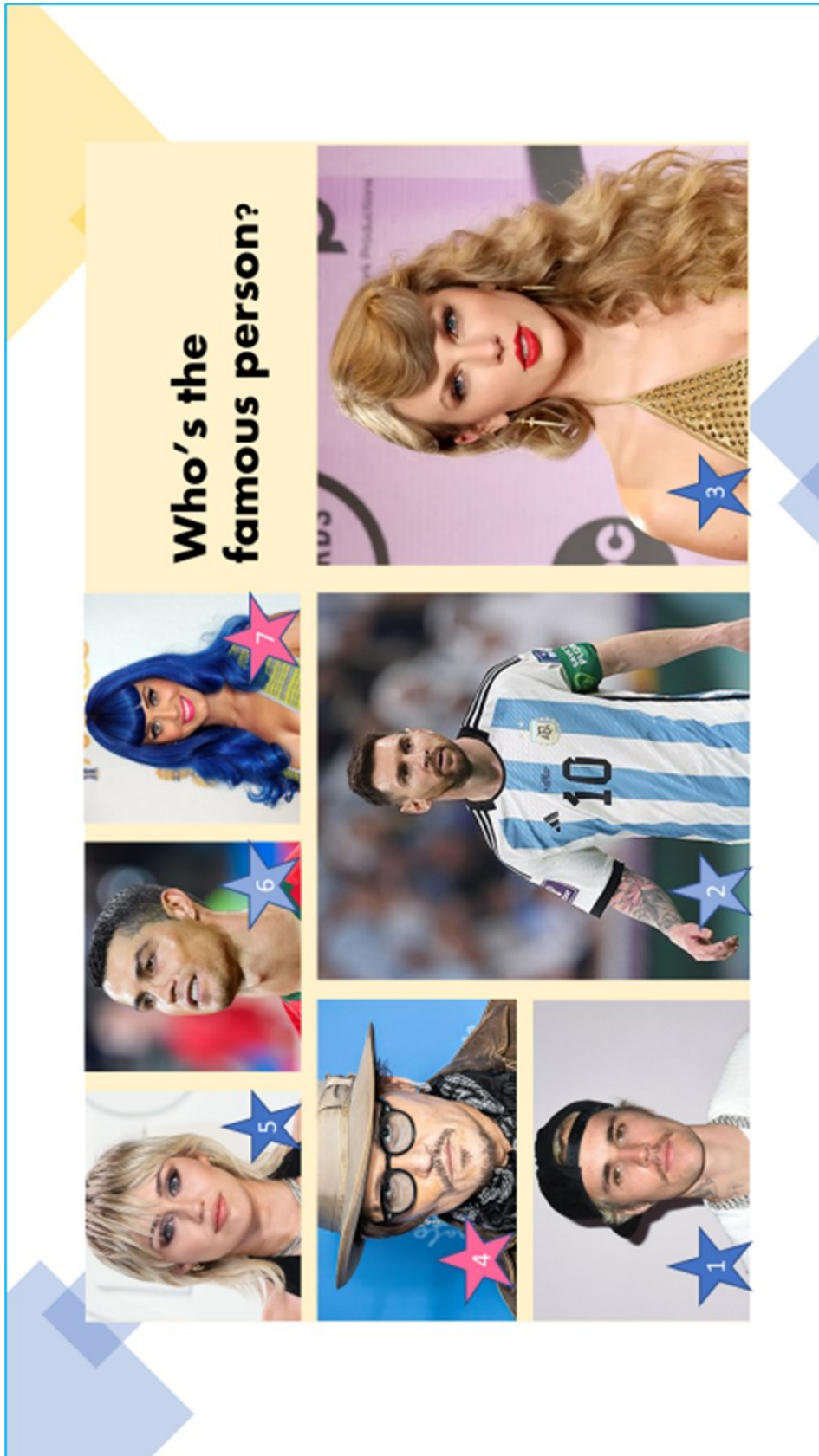
Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Poster with pictures of celebrities from magazines and newspapers (see Figure 4)

Procedure: Students play in teams. Each team chooses the celebrity on the poster they want to describe without letting the other teams know which one he/she is. Then the team starts describing the celebrity while the other teams must guess who the celebrity is. In turn, students can say a feature of the celebrity. Once the celebrity has been guessed, the team that first guessed the celebrity chooses a number and starts describing him/her. The game is adapted from Bertarini et al. (2017:54).

Who wins: The team that manages to guess the most celebrities and scores the most tokens wins the game.

Figure 4: Who's the famous person?



Wild crossword puzzle

Language: Use of vocabulary regarding wild animals

Skills: Reading, writing, and spelling

Control: Guided

Level: Beginners

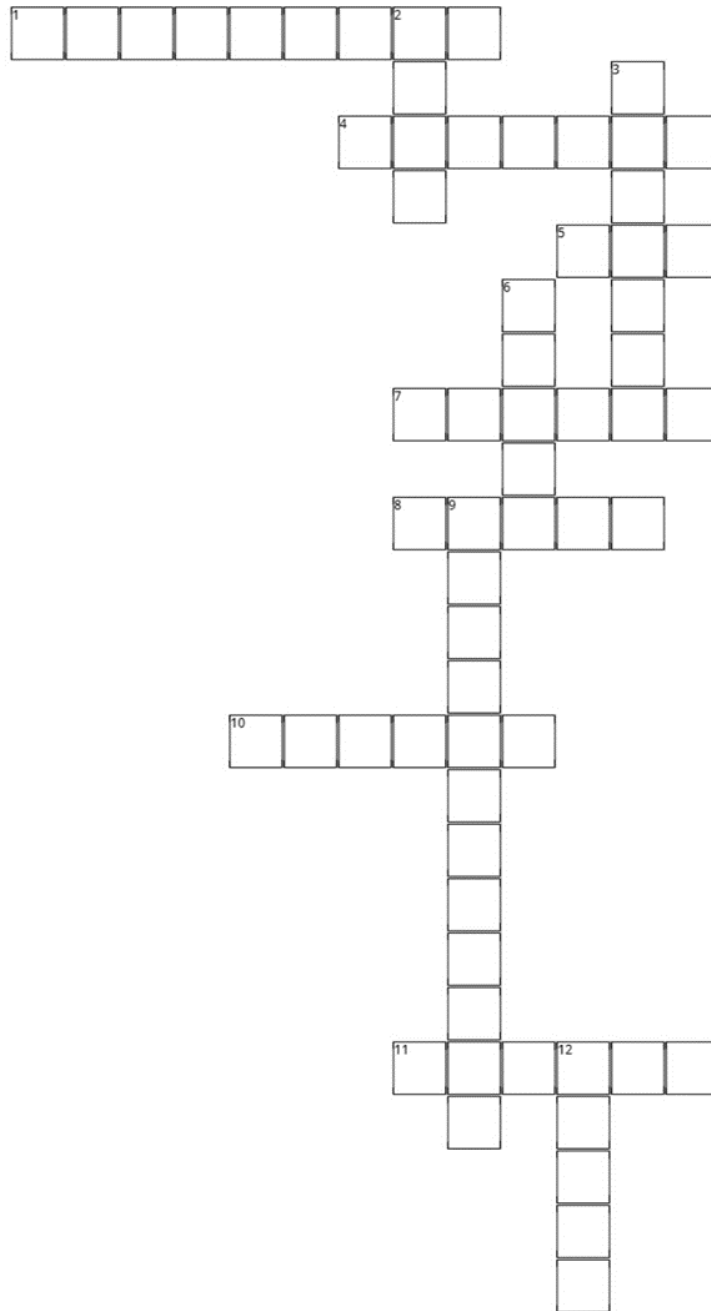
Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Crossword puzzle sheet (see Figure 5)

Procedure: Students play in teams. Each student is given a crossword puzzle sheet. Each word in the puzzle corresponds to a definition of a wild animal. Students must read the definitions and write the name of the animal correctly in the space provided. The game is adapted from the class textbook Bertarini et al. (2017:139). Some new words that the students did not know were included in the descriptions of the animals. These words were sharp, hard shell, spots, and leaves.

Who wins: The group that first completes the entire crossword correctly wins and gets a token. It is essential that the spelling of the words is correct.

Figure 5: Wild crossword puzzle



Across

1. It is a green animal. It has four legs and a tail. It lives in the rivers. It has a big mouth with sharp teeth.
4. It is a marine mammal with teeth and a long nose. It is very friendly.
5. It is a black animal. It is a small animal like a mouse with wings and claws.
7. This animal lives in the trees and eats bananas.
8. This animal lives in the oceans. It is a big fish with a big mouth and sharp teeth.
10. It is a colourful bird that can speak.
11. It is a reptile that can swim and has a soft body with a hard shell.

Down

2. It is the king of the jungle. It has brown fur, sharp teeth, a long tail, and it lives in the savanna.
3. It is an animal with spots and it eats leaves. It is very tall and has a very long neck.
6. A big black and white mammal from central China that eats bamboo.
9. A big grey African animal with a big head and mouth that lives near water.
12. It is black and orange and it has sharp teeth. It lives in the jungle.

Word scramble

Language: Familiarization with wild animal vocabulary

Skills: Writing and spelling

Control: Controlled

Level: Beginners

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Wild animal word scramble sheet (see Figure 6)






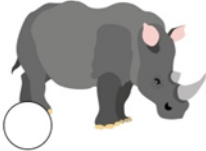










Procedure: Students play in teams. Each student is given a wild animal word scramble sheet. In ten minutes, each group must correctly rewrite the names of as many wild animals as possible on the sheet and link them to the corresponding picture. Some new words that the students did not know were included, and they were alligator, kangaroo and deer.

Who wins: The group that identifies the most animals wins and gets a token. The words must be spelled correctly and must be linked to the correct image otherwise they cannot be considered valid.

Figure 6: Word scramble

Wild Animals

Word Scramble



1. ptnaheel _____
2. algtlraoi _____
3. dpana _____
4. lino _____
5. hoppi _____
6. rilgalo _____
7. ebzra _____
8. raaookng _____
9. gifaefr _____
10. kneas _____
11. irnho _____
12. fwlo _____
13. edre _____
14. yokemn _____
15. ebar _____
16. etrig _____

Hangman

Language: Guessing, inferring, and suggesting. Combination of letters to spell a mystery word.

Skills: All

Control: Guided

Level: Beginners

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Digital whiteboard and list of words regarding wild animals from which students can make a guess to identify the right word (see Figure 7). The words are taken from the class textbook (Bertarini et al. 2017:80–83).

Procedure: Students play in teams. The teacher draws one dash for each letter of the word she is thinking of. The word is chosen from the list given to students. Students suggest a letter that they think might be in the word. If it is, the teacher writes it in above the appropriate dash and the student gains a token for his/her group. If not, she draws one part of the *Hangman* as in Figure 7. The game is adapted from Wright et al. (1983:115).

Who wins: The first team to guess the highest number of words and with the highest number of tokens wins the game.

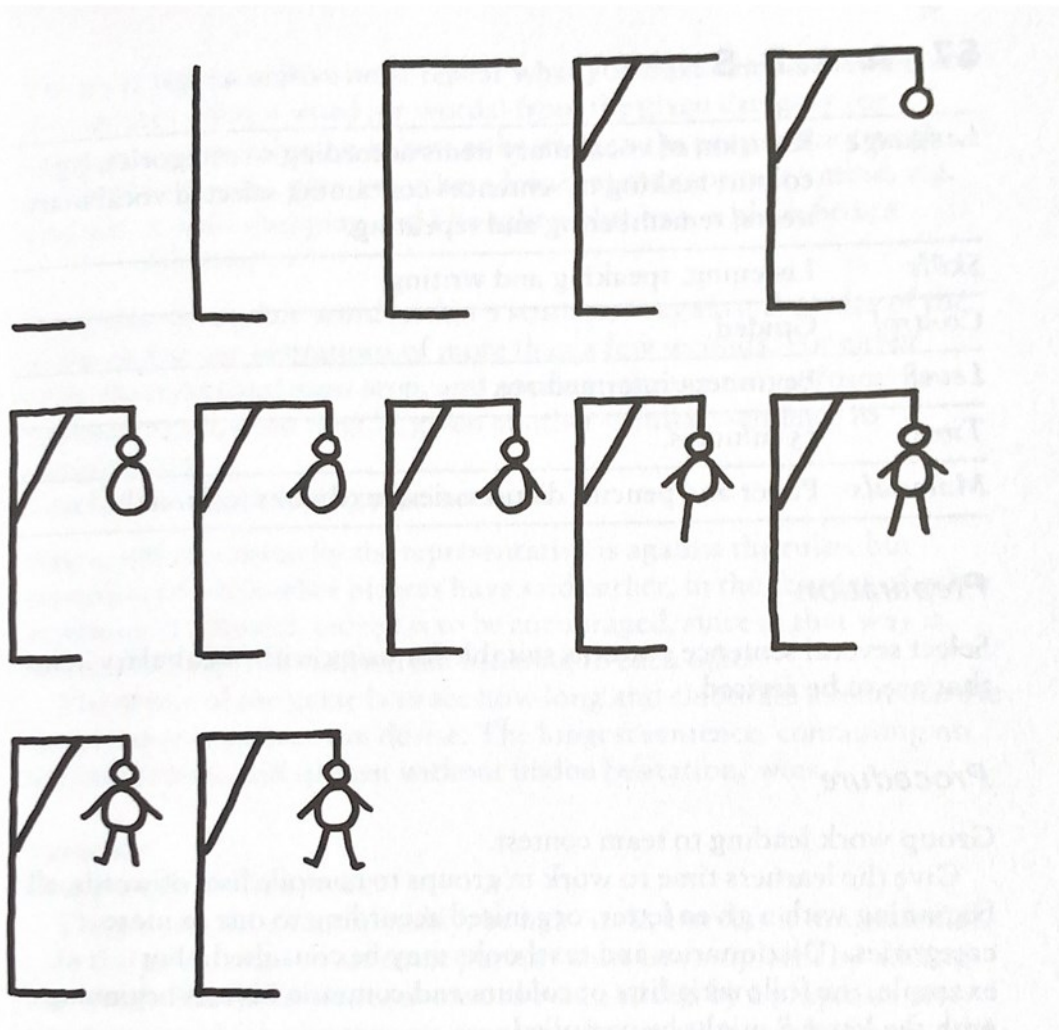
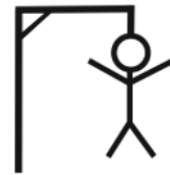
Figure 7: Hangman



- | | |
|--------|-----------|
| Bat | Frog |
| Fur | Trunk |
| Claws | Tapir |
| Lizard | Feathers |
| Jaguar | Whiskers |
| Parrot | Butterfly |
| Iguana | Spider |
| Scales | Insect |



Hangman



Connections

Language: Use of vocabulary regarding wild animals and spelling practice

Skills: Writing and spelling

Control: Guided

Level: Beginners

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure: Students play in teams. The teacher assigns each team a word relating to wild animals, e.g., tiger, shark, lion, parrot. Each team must create a chain of words associated with the given word. Each team must write down the word chain created. The game should be done as a fast game. The game is adapted from Wight et al. (1983:124). An example of word chain can be:

Teacher: Shark

Students: Fish, ocean, teeth, grey, Shark Tale...

Who wins: The team that creates the longest and most correctly spelled word chain wins the game and receives a token.

Word-race

Language: Familiarization with vocabulary regarding wild animals and spelling practice

Control: Guided

Skills: Writing and spelling

Level: Beginners

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Picture of tropical forest with wild animals screened on digital whiteboard (see Figure 8)

Procedure: Students play in teams. Each group looks at the picture of the tropical forest, which is similar to but not identical with the one present in the class textbook. In ten minutes, each group has to write down correctly the names of as many wild animals visible in the picture as possible, e.g., *three butterflies, a tiger, a lizard, two frogs, a parrot...* The game is adapted from Lee (1979:46).

Who wins: The team that in ten minutes identifies the most animals wins and gets a token. The words must be spelled correctly otherwise they cannot be considered valid.

Figure 8: Word-race



3.2.2 Structure of the lessons

The games were carried out in two lessons for a total of three hours. Each lesson lasted one hour and a half. The lessons were conducted with students I did not know at all and at the beginning of the first lesson, I was introduced to the class. I explained to the students my project concerning the use of competitive games for teaching and learning English as a foreign language. I told the students that they were going to play different types of games covering two distinct topics. Then, I explained to them that at the end of the project they were going to complete an anonymous questionnaire to evaluate the games conducted in the classroom. They were asked to complete the questionnaire as sincerely as possible, feeling free to criticise the games if necessary. They were given the opportunity to write their comments freely at the end of the questionnaire and were encouraged to write down what they liked or disliked about the games and lessons.

Three games were played in the first lesson (*The guessing game*, *Find the intruder* and *Who's the famous person?*), and five games were played in the second lesson (*Wild crossword puzzle*, *Word scramble*, *Hangman*, *Connections*, and *Word-race*). At the beginning of both lessons, I revised with the students the vocabulary required for the games in that lesson. I asked the students to do some brainstorming according to the topic of the lesson, and I wrote the words on the blackboard. In this way, a list of words necessary to play the games was created. In *The guessing game*, for example, students were asked to write a description of their classmates. For this reason, I asked them to tell me vocabulary related to clothing, accessories, and physical description. The words that emerged were then listed on the blackboard. For both lessons, the language review lasted between five and ten minutes, as the students knew many of the words and actively participated in this first part of the lesson. This was followed by the explanation of the first game and the start of the competition.

The games were played with a fixed amount of time, but sometimes it was necessary to give students extra time. However, all games were successfully carried out. As already mentioned in Section 3.2, to stress the competitive element all games were played in teams that were maintained for both lessons and points were scored on the scoreboard. To distinguish each group well, the students' desks were divided into groups. In this way, each team had a defined space where they could work. During the games, I occasionally

helped some teams with new words they did not know the meaning of or in spelling difficult words. However, the students played autonomously, collaborating with their teammates.

The questionnaire was administered by the teacher during her lesson the day after the end of the project. Due to time constraints, I could not administer the questionnaire myself, as it would have taken too much time in the second lesson. I wanted the games to be an enjoyable activity and not a test of students' abilities. Therefore, no tests on the students' acquired knowledge were carried out. The students' opinions and the results of the questionnaire will be discussed in detail in the next chapter together with the teacher's interview.

CHAPTER IV

Results

In this chapter, I will discuss the results obtained during the activity at the primary school. Firstly, I will provide an analysis of the games carried out in the classroom and an explanation of the theory behind the creation of the games. Secondly, I will show and discuss the results of the students' questionnaire. Thirdly, I will consider the teacher's opinion of the activity by discussing the interview conducted with her. Finally, I will consider the limitations of the study and provide insights for further research on the use of competitive games for foreign language teaching.

4.1 Analysis of the activity

As already mentioned in Chapter III, the games were created based on the students' level of English proficiency, the teaching schedule during the school year and the teacher's opinion on the suitability of the games. An explanation of the theory behind the creation of the games, combined with data collected in the classroom through direct observation and personal journal, follows.

The decision to choose competitive games where teams were maintained for both lessons was based on reasons of time and fun for the students (Rooswinkel 2014:3). As Wright et al. (1983:3) stated, to create balanced teams and fair competition, teams should be created considering students' skills. Therefore, since I did not know the students at all, the teacher chose the teams based on their abilities and any possible specific learning difficulties. Her knowledge of the class and of the students' language level was crucial to the success of the games. The teams were well balanced, and the students felt more motivated to participate, as all teams had an equal chance to win the games. Indeed, when competition is used in language teaching, it is very important that students have a fair chance of winning the game. If competition is unfair, students may not want to participate in other competitive learning tasks in the future (Rooswinkel 2014:4). Moreover, as suggested by Wright et al. (1983:3), no group leader was assigned per team so that all students worked in the same way. This decision was fundamental as all students were actively involved in the activity. For this reason, in games such as *Who's the famous person?* and *The guessing*

game, shy or reluctant students were able to talk and get involved. The choice of playing in teams was effective as the students could support each other and achieve the same goal (Wright et al. 1983:3). In this way, all the students' skills (which did not only relate to their English knowledge) were useful for playing the game. For example, in the game *Wild crossword puzzle* some of the children did not know all the words in the definitions but had great intuition. This allowed the team to work out which animal was it and the teammate who was better at spelling wrote down the correct word. Therefore, games could promote integration and collaboration between students. The desire to achieve a common goal motivated the students to share their knowledge and collaborate with each other. This not only encouraged meaningful learning, but also gave the students an opportunity to see how much they can learn from each other and win together (Luise 2006).

Another key aspect was how to set a score and how to set the rules. The choices made on how to establish the points and rules were aimed at making the games as engaging as possible. As suggested by Wright et al. (1983:3–4), the games and their rules were explained in the students' first language to avoid misunderstandings and to achieve success. In order to make the activity more fun and to maintain a competitive environment, it was decided to create a scoreboard where the students glued the tokens they won during the games. This was based on what Lee (1979:7–10) stated about the importance of maintaining a scoreboard where each team could decide its own name and on the importance of viewing points to strengthen the students' belief that the task is worth the effort (Vandercruysse et al. 2013:929). The possibility of freely choosing the teams' names immediately united the members of the teams, guaranteeing a friendly and fun environment. Moreover, at the end of the second lesson, although only one team won the entire competition, all the students in the class received the final prize. This aspect is fundamental in the playful language teaching methodology, as students should be rewarded if they complete the games successfully but should not be penalised if they do not (Lee 1979:7–10).

Time was another key aspect to consider. Since some games were more challenging than others, more time was given. However, great attention was paid to the time allowed for each game, not only because the lessons lasted an hour and a half each, but also to ensure that the games were not boring for the students. This is in line with Wright et al. (1983:3–

4) as teachers may opt to extend the game, but it should be done for a limited period of time as students may get bored. In addition, following the students' requests, some games were repeated. During the first lesson the students asked to play again *The guessing games* and *Whos' the famous person?*, whereas during the second lesson they asked to repeat *Hangman* and *Connections*. The teacher and I intervened only if necessary during the games. Hence, once the teams were in action, we went from team to team to listen, give our contribution and, only if needed, help students (Wright et al. 1983:3–4). As suggested by Vandercruysse (2013:929), competitive games can be effective if there is room for improvement, which is more likely if help or support is available to students (e.g., a teacher).

Great attention was also paid to the classroom environment during games. As claimed by Luise (2006), games provide a playful context to increase students' motivation and attention. By creating such an atmosphere, students are much more likely to achieve meaningful learning as all their abilities are activated, and an engaging learning experience is provided. Therefore, the students felt stimulated by feeling as an integral part of the activity and actively participated in the game using all their abilities, thereby learning the language. Indeed, if not overdeveloped and cause of negative behaviours, competition is a rich source of motivation that can stimulate meaningful learning. Hence, the games were a challenge for the children, and in some games, they even added elements to the competition. In *The guessing game* and *Who's the famous person?* the students tried to make descriptions as complex as possible so that the opposing teams did not win tokens. The results were well-done descriptions with a rather sophisticated vocabulary. In addition, in the game *Connections* (where the children were given a word on which to build a word-chain) the students were so motivated and involved in the game that they created actual descriptions of the assigned animals. The result was surprising, as the children not only made the game more complex but also combined the themes of the two lessons, i.e., physical description and wild animals. Some examples are:

Shark: it lives in the ocean, big fish and big mouth, sharp teeth. Colour is grey and light blue. It eats fish.

Lion: it has 4 legs. It has a brown mane and 20 claws. It's got whiskers. It has a yellow body. It eats meat. From Savana.




Tiger: it's black and orange. It has got claws and whiskers. It has got fur. It can run. It lives in the south America. It is intelligent. It is aggressive.

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the success of the games was also thanks to the skill of the children, who were not only well prepared in English but also willing to take on challenges. Indeed, it was great to work with this class as the students had a good language level and were interested in learning new things. The next section will deal with the results of the questionnaire and the students' opinions.




4.2 Discussion of students' questionnaire

To evaluate the games, I will show the results of the students' questionnaire. I will comment on the activity and on the games based on the data collected using information obtained through the students' questionnaire (see Appendix 1). As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the class consisted of 19 students. All students took part in both lessons, so it was possible to collect a complete number of answers. The questions and answers to the questionnaire will be discussed below.

1. In generale, ti sono piaciuti i giochi?




		
19	0	0

2. Sei stato interessato alle attività svolte?




		
19	0	0

3. Esprimi un'opinione per ogni gioco:




The guessing game

		
16	3	0




Find the intruder

		
16	3	0




Who's the famous person?

		
14	5	0




Wild crossword puzzle

		
17	2	0




Word scramble

		
18	1	0




Hangman

		
15	4	0

Connections

		
14	5	0

Word-race

		
18	1	0




4. Quale gioco o quali giochi ti sono piaciuti di più?

Find the intruder	4
Who's the famous person?	1
Wild crossword puzzle	1
Word-scramble	1
Hangman	2
Connections	1
Word-race	1
Tutti	8




5. Quale gioco ti è piaciuto di meno?

The guessing game	1
Find the intruder	1
Who's the famous person?	2
Hangman	3
Connections	2
Word-race	1
Nessuno	9




6. Le consegne dell'insegnante sono state chiare?

		
19	0	0




7. Dopo queste lezioni, ti sembra di ricordare meglio le parole in inglese?

		
17	2	0




8. Alla fine delle attività, pensi di essere migliorato in inglese?

		
18	1	0




9. Secondo te, quello che hai imparato ti potrà essere utile?

		
18	1	0




10. Ti è piaciuto lavorare in squadra?

		
16	3	0




11. Hai partecipato con impegno?

		
17	2	0




12. Ti sei sentito in imbarazzo?

		
18	1	0

13. Il clima in classe durante il gioco era:

		
17	2	0

14. Ti piacerebbe utilizzare ancora in classe giochi come quelli svolti in queste due lezioni?

		
19	0	0

15. Commenti

A. Penso che i giochi siano stati molto insegnativi, divertenti e interessanti.
B. I giochi erano belli, mi sono piaciuti.
C. Sono stati bellissimi!!! Un divertimento pazzesco. Ho conosciuto molte cose interessanti e ho anche ripassato. Sono stata molto contenta, un'esperienza che vorrei ripetere. Ciao!
D. Bellissimo perché abbiamo svolto tanti giochi divertenti.
E. Per me sono stati bellissimi e anche divertenti e ho imparato nuove cose.
F. È stato molto bello tutti i giochi e spero che torni così potremo fare altri giochi.
G. Le lezioni mi sono sembrate bellissime e divertenti e meravigliose.
H. Penso che i giochi siano stati molto divertenti e impegnativi e che Lucrezia sia molto matura e brava. Vorrei che questa esperienza continui.
I. Sono stati abbastanza belli.
J. A me è piaciuto tantissimo e lo rifarei altre mille volte.
K. Per me i giochi in inglese sono stati molto belli e ci aiuteranno in inglese.
L. Molto bello soprattutto il gioco Word-scramble.

M. Io penso che siano stati molto creativi e divertenti e ci hanno fatto lavorare molto sul gioco di squadra.

N. Mi è piaciuto molto perché l'abbiamo fatto tutti insieme ed era un argomento che non facciamo quasi mai.

In general, the games and the lessons were positively evaluated by the students, as none of the questions in the questionnaire was answered negatively. Indeed, all students liked the games “very much” and confirmed that they were interested in the classroom activities (questions 1 and 2). Most of them also reported that the games were useful in language learning, and they better remember the vocabulary covered in the two lessons (questions 7 and 9). Moreover, 18 out of 19 students believe that they have improved their English level thanks to the games played (question 8).

According to 16 out of 19 students, the class enjoyed working in teams (question 10). Furthermore, the results show that most of the students participated with effort and did not feel embarrassed while playing the games (questions 11 and 12). In addition, 17 out of 19 students asserted that the atmosphere in the classroom during the games was positive and learning friendly (question 13). All students stated that the teacher's instructions were clear and that they would like to use games such as those played in the two lessons (questions 6 and 14).

With regard to the third question of the questionnaire, i.e., expressing an opinion for each game, the results are generally positive. Indeed, it can be said that overall, the games were appreciated by the students as there is no negative feedback for any game. However, some games were preferred over others. The results indicate that the games students liked best were *Word-scramble* and *Word-race*, whereas *Who's the famous person?* and *Connections* were the least liked.

The fourth and fifth questions of the questionnaire were the most difficult to interpret as they were open questions and there was no trend in the answers. In the response table of question 4, I have reported what the students wrote trying to quantify the answers. When asked "quale gioco o quali giochi ti sono piaciuti di più?" many students answered "all" or, quoting some of the answers “tutti bellissimi”, “erano belli tutti, mi sono piaciuti”. In addition, as the results show, 4 out of 19 students really liked the game *Find the intruder*.

Therefore, the results indicate that in general the games were well balanced and appreciated by the students.

The answers to the fifth question were very similar to those of the fourth. As shown in the response table of question 5, the evidence suggests that there is no game that the students did not like. 9 out of 19 students stated that they liked all the games, and some of the answers in the questionnaire were “nessuno”, “nessuno tutti mi piacciono”. However, the second data that can be seen from the response table is that 3 out of 19 students reported *Hangman* as the game they liked least.

The last section of the questionnaire, i.e., the comments section (question 15), was totally free and not mandatory. 14 out of 19 students answered this question and their answers were reported in the response table. The answers were listed in random order and each answer was assigned a letter. As shown in the response table of question 15, the evidence suggests that the students really enjoyed the lessons and games played in class. I was very impressed by the self-critical spirit of the children who in some answers (answer M and N) appreciated the fact that they worked in groups. Some of them pointed out that these are topics to which not much time is given and that they were happy to learn new things (answer C, E and N). One student also highlighted that the games were an enjoyable experience and would help them improve their English level (answer K). In particular, I was positively impressed by the answers C, F, H and J where students stated that they would like to repeat or continue with this experience. Furthermore, in almost all the answers the children stated that the games were very nice and fun.

The evidence shows that games are activities that aim to teach and reinforce foreign language skills in an enjoyable and challenging way. As far as students' opinions are concerned, they proved to be valuable and effective tools in language teaching and learning. Furthermore, almost all the answers and comments written by the students at the end of the questionnaire are positive.

4.3 Discussion of teacher's interview

The following section deals with the interview conducted with the English teacher, which took place at the end of the two lessons. The interview was semi-structured; the teacher

was asked specific questions but was free to explore other aspects. Indeed, a semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that combines a predetermined set of open-ended questions (questions that stimulate discussion) with an opportunity for the interviewer to further explore specific topics or responses (Brinkmann 2014:424–25). The interview lasted about 20 minutes and was held in Italian. Moreover, the teacher agreed to be recorded. The following are the questions and the teacher's answers. A report of the teacher's answers will be shown for practical purposes.

1. What do you think about the experience carried out in the classroom?

The teacher states that she is very satisfied with the experience. The themes chosen and the level of the games met her expectations and those of the students. As the students already mentioned in the questionnaire, these are themes which have been dealt with in class during the school year but to which, unfortunately, not too much time was given due to the very busy schedules. However, the children were well prepared and faced the games with enthusiasm and interest.

2. Was teamwork effective?

A lot of time was spent in setting up the groups, as some children have some specific learning difficulties, and one child is supervised by the support teacher. For this reason, the teacher chose to create teams of 4/5 students based on their abilities and not only on their English proficiency. In addition, she also considered the character of the students as some are more active than others and more difficult to manage when placed in the same team. However, the teacher often uses teamwork because the students like it so much. By working in teams, they feel less pressure and collaborate actively. However, good organisation of the activity is necessary otherwise it can result in a waste of time. In addition, the decision not to include team leaders was effective, as all students were involved in the games, and no one hid behind the skills of more capable students.

5. How was the atmosphere in the classroom during the games?

The teacher confirms that the atmosphere during the games was positive and conducive to learning. A fair competition was created between the teams, which led the students to give their best. According to the teacher, all the children in the class are very competitive and love these kinds of games. Therefore, the students are always enthusiastic and interested when using competitive games in the classroom. However, it is not always easy to keep the class under control during games. For example, in the game *Hangman*, the children tended to get up from their desks and shout the words they thought were the solution. Similarly, in the game *Find the intruder*, it was difficult to enforce turn-taking as all the children wanted to talk at the same time. However, although it was sometimes difficult to maintain order in class, students always respected the rules of the games while playing.

6. Were competitive games effective in teaching and learning the language?

According to the teacher, competitive games are a valuable method for teaching and learning not only foreign languages but also other subjects, as games add fun to learning. Students always participate with interest and activate skills that during traditional classes they only use passively. The teacher argued that during the two lessons carried out with the students they reviewed and learned new vocabulary, improving their English level.

7. Compared to traditional lessons, were competitive games more effective in language teaching?

According to the teacher, compared to traditional lessons, children are certainly more involved when using games and this can lead to more effective learning. As games are student-centred activities, the students are more willing to participate. Moreover, competitive games can involve all basic language skills and add fun to the lesson. In addition, competitive games can encourage everyone to take a turn, including students who are shy or have weaker language skills. Especially for primary school students, games are a well-liked method as the lessons are more interactive. However, when using

games in the classroom it is important to have a well-organized activity, otherwise they might be perceived by students only as a time for rest and not for learning.

8. Do you often use games in your lessons?

The teacher often tries to use games in her lessons, especially as a review of previously covered topics. For example, in one of her last geography lessons she divided the students in groups and the children had to create crossword puzzles using tablets. The students were asked to create definitions of seas, regions, cities, or rivers and then send the crossword puzzle to the digital board, where another group had to solve the puzzle. In this way, in turn, each team had to create a crossword puzzle and another team had to solve it. The activity proved to be effective and more engaging than a regular lesson.

9. What are the problems in using games in the classroom?

The teacher confirms that games are excellent activities for teaching and learning several subjects. However, they have some negative aspects that should not be underestimated. She claims that games require time to be prepared and time to be played, more than the amount of time needed to carry out traditional lessons. Moreover, the syllabus is quite demanding, and teachers are asked to evaluate students frequently. The evaluation of games is problematic, and it is not suitable to give marks when games are played. For this reason, it is not always possible to use games in the classroom. Moreover, students like games because they do not feel the pressure and fear of being judged. They know winning and losing matters, but losing does not mean getting a bad grade. When performance on games is rated, some of the fun and excitement can be lost.

10. Further comments

The teacher confirms that she is satisfied with the activity. It was useful for students to play the games toward the end of the school year not only to review or learn new vocabulary, but also to keep the students' interest and motivation toward language learning alive. At the end of the year, it is indeed more difficult to carry out interesting

activities for students. In addition, since she is not a specialised English teacher, she also confirms that she would like to continue with specialised playful learning projects on English language teaching.

In conclusion, the evidence shows that practical issues come into play when teachers must decide whether to play games. Indeed, the time to play often lacks and games are difficult to integrate with the syllabus as assessment is problematic. However, the teacher reports that students can effectively learn through competitive games. In addition, she believes that fun, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of games, is important for language learning and she considers competitive games as valuable activities. Therefore, the teacher's opinion of the games and the lessons is positive. In addition, she describes the students' attitude towards games positively and she reports that the students were willing to play and took part in the games with effort and interest.

4.4 Limitations of the study

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, no tests were carried out on the knowledge acquired by the students during the games. Indeed, the games were designed to be enjoyable activities and not a test of the students' language skills. For this reason, no results were collected on the vocabulary learned during the games, but only on whether competitive games were valid activities for teaching and learning English as a foreign language. In addition, the games consisted of two lessons based on the vocabulary of physical description, accessories, clothing, and wild animals that the students already knew. Some new words were introduced (such as in the definitions of the game *Wild crossword puzzle*) but the students did not have to study before the lessons and had free access to books and notebooks. For this reason, the results of a test conducted on the vocabulary learned during the games would not be reliable, as the students were already familiar with the topics covered in the games. Moreover, as pointed out also by the English teacher, a summative test on the students' abilities would be in contrast with the principles of the playful language teaching methodology (Ceriani 2014:22). Hence, when games are rated, some of the fun and excitement included in playing can be lost.

Due to the young age of the students, a self-assessment on the acquired knowledge was also excluded. According to Ceriani (2014:22), in the playful language teaching methodology an assessment in which the students actively participate by reflecting, thanks to the help of the teacher, on the achieved results, on the difficulties that remain and on those that have been overcome is preferred. However, such an assessment would not have been possible also due to the brief nature of the activity. In fact, this type of assessment would have required more mature students with a higher capacity for self-reflection and a larger project, perhaps covering an entire teaching unit. For this reason, it was preferred to give the students a questionnaire on their enjoyment of the activity with some questions for self-reflection (questions 7 and 8) and not a self-assessment on their abilities.

4.5 Further research

Through direct observation, the use of competitive games provided insights for further research on inclusive English language lessons. Indeed, some members of the class had additional educational needs and the use of competitive games proved to be effective for these students for several reasons. Firstly, they were well distributed in the teams, where they actively collaborated with their teammates and were well involved in the activity. Indeed, by feeling well included and part of the team, they were motivated to play and win the game. As their contribution to the team was fundamental, the competition was not an obstacle but a challenge to win. Secondly, the games did not require a particular skill but a set of skills. Since there were no texts to read or write, and students could help each other in teamwork, the difficulties of these students were almost completely negligible. This was a key point that contributed not only to increasing the students' level of English but also their motivation to study the language. Thus, competitive games proved not only to add fun to language learning but also to be an effective and inclusive methodology for all students. Thirdly, the children were relieved of the emotional stress of an assessment. According to the teacher, these students tend not to experience the assessment period well or experience it worse than their classmates. During the assessments, they are given different tests according to their difficulties, but this is not always perceived positively by the students. The use of competitive games, on the other

hand, gave these students the opportunity to learn and have fun while overcoming their learning difficulties.

In conclusion, the use of competitive games as a foreign language teaching and learning methodology could lead to positive results in students with additional educational needs. Hence, competitive games can lead to inclusive learning and foster motivation in foreign language learning. For this reason, an increased use of competitive games in schools could lead to satisfactory results also for students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Moreover, the use of games as an alternative form of language assessment could be beneficial for all students. Indeed, connections could be made through ideal conditions for language assessment (including, for example, lowering anxiety) and play. Therefore, further research is needed.

4.6 Concluding remarks

In the light of the above, competitive games appear to be a valuable classroom methodology for teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The results of the student questionnaire and the interview with the teacher show that competitive games can have a positive impact on language teaching and learning. However, games have some considerable disadvantages and, therefore, their application in the classroom is not always possible. The games did, nevertheless, provide insights for further research on the use of competitive games as a methodology for teaching and learning English as a foreign language also for students with additional educational needs and as an alternative form of language assessment. Hence, more research is needed.

CONCLUSION

The research project was designed to evaluate competitive language teaching games. The aim of the dissertation was to determine whether competitive language teaching games were valuable activities for language teaching and learning, analysing opinions of both students and the English teacher.

The data paint a positive picture. Both the students and the teacher who took part in the project reported positively about their experiences with games. The analysis of the data collected confirms that the majority of the students described the games as useful and fun and indicate that they would like to repeat them. The teacher involved in the project also rated the games positively. She reported that games could reinforce language skills in a fun way and that they were properly linked to the language skills they were designed to teach. Caon (2020) argues that games can promote meaningful learning, i.e., a situation in which students are challenged and involved. The responses of the teacher's interview support this claim and show that games can encourage higher levels of student participation. The teacher stated that the students were willing to play, very interested and involved in the games, i.e., motivated to learn the language. According to Butera et al. (2021), games are commonly described as being able to create a positive and fun atmosphere. The analysis of the collected data confirms this assessment: almost all students found the atmosphere in the classroom to be positive and generally described it as pleasant and playful. The teacher also reported that the games created a positive environment that was both playful and stimulating. Indeed, the games proved to be valuable in stimulating both competition and collaboration. On the one hand, the students were greatly involved in the games and tried to achieve its goal, i.e., they competed against each other. On the other hand, they worked together: they played in teams and helped each other, combining their skills to achieve victory. These data support Huyen and Khuat's (2003) assertion that games can stimulate friendly competition.

The information gathered supports the idea that games are valuable activities, but they should be integrated into the classroom under specific conditions. First, the teacher should be familiar with the games and be able to clearly explain their rules. Second, the games should be carefully prepared and adapted to the class in which they will be used. Third, it

is the teacher who should be the first to approach the activity with enthusiasm. If these conditions are respected, games can positively and effectively intervene in the language class.

The analysis of the results leads to a positive answer to the research question of the dissertation: if competitive games can be valuable activities for language teaching and learning. However, the limitations of the study must also be pointed out. The evaluation focused on how games were perceived by the students and the teacher and tried to analyse whether games were appreciated or not as language teaching and learning activities. The aim was also to show practical problems that can arise when implementing games in the classroom. However, the research was not concerned with the process of learning development. Therefore, there were no post-game tests to determine whether games lead to the acquisition of new language elements or the consolidation of previous knowledge, as this would have required a different approach. Hence, conclusions on the effectiveness of the games were based only on the opinions of the teacher and the students, and not on the results of language tests.

Further research could be carried out in this respect to investigate the effectiveness of games as an alternative form of language assessment. Indeed, connections could be made through ideal conditions for language assessment (including, for example, lowering anxiety) and games. Moreover, the use of competitive games provided insights for further research on inclusive English language lessons. As competitive games involve different skills and give students the opportunity to collaborate and help each other, an increased use of competitive games in schools could lead to satisfactory results also for students with learning difficulties or disabilities.

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APPENDIX 1

Students' Questionnaire

Segna con una x la risposta più adatta a te o completa la risposta.

1. In generale, ti sono piaciuti i giochi?




2. Sei stato interessato alle attività svolte?



3. Esprimi un'opinione per ogni gioco:

The guessing game	Descrivi il compagno pescato nel bigliettino	
Find the intruder	Trova l'intruso	
Who's the famous person?	Descrivi la persona famosa	
Wild crossword puzzle	Cruciverba	
Word scramble	Riordina le lettere e collega l'animale all'immagine	
Hagman	Impiccato	
Connections	Crea una catena di parole più lunga possibile per l'animale dato (lion, shark, panter, tiger)	

Word-race	Trova più animali possibili nell'immagine alla LIM	
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4. **Quale gioco o quali giochi ti sono piaciuti di più?**

.....

5. **Quale gioco ti è piaciuto di meno?**

.....

6. **Le consegne dell'insegnante sono state chiare?**



7. **Dopo queste lezioni, ti sembra di ricordare meglio le parole in inglese?**



8. **Alla fine delle attività, pensi di essere migliorato in inglese?**



9. **Secondo te, quello che hai imparato ti potrà essere utile?**



10. **Ti è piaciuto lavorare in squadra?**



11. **Hai partecipato con impegno?**



12. Ti sei sentito in imbarazzo?



13. Il clima in classe durante il gioco era:



14. Ti piacerebbe utilizzare ancora in classe giochi come quelli svolti in queste due lezioni?



15. Commenti

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Grazie di cuore per aver partecipato!

SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

Questa tesi si occupa dell'uso dei giochi come metodologia per l'insegnamento dell'inglese come lingua straniera. Si propone di valutare l'uso dei giochi didattici, ossia di attività ludiche il cui scopo è quello di insegnare o rafforzare le competenze linguistiche. La natura della ricerca è principalmente pratica: si tratta di un progetto di ricerca in classe in una scuola primaria volto a raccogliere dati sull'opinione degli studenti e dell'insegnante in merito ai giochi didattici. I dati raccolti vengono analizzati e discussi in relazione alla seguente domanda: i giochi competitivi sono attività valide per l'insegnamento e l'apprendimento delle lingue?

Lo studio teorico e la ricerca sulla metodologia di insegnamento ludico delle lingue sono alla base della tesi. Infatti, il primo capitolo fornisce una panoramica sui giochi come metodologia di insegnamento delle lingue. Il capitolo inizia dando una definizione della parola gioco: il gioco è un'attività che gli esseri umani hanno bisogno di fare ed è ordinato da regole stabilite dai partecipanti. Svolge un ruolo importante nella vita umana, in quanto i giochi sono elementi fondamentali per la socializzazione e la comunicazione tra le persone. Inoltre, i giochi possono insegnare elementi significativi come l'importanza di regole fisse, di un tempo stabilito e della creazione di una realtà fittizia accettata dai partecipanti.

L'uso del gioco come metodologia di insegnamento delle lingue viene definito metodologia ludica. La tesi prosegue analizzando l'approccio umanistico affettivo, a cui appartiene la metodologia di insegnamento ludico delle lingue. Il termine approccio umanistico-affettivo si riferisce all'approccio che considera gli studenti e i loro bisogni personali al centro del processo di apprendimento. L'obiettivo di questo approccio è quello di concentrarsi sull'individuo come persona e sui suoi bisogni non solo da un punto di vista pragmatico e comunicativo, ma anche personale. Pertanto, il concetto principale di questo approccio è quello di considerare gli studenti non solo come discenti, ma anche e soprattutto come individui. L'obiettivo dell'educazione umanistica va oltre l'educazione cognitiva e intellettuale e abbraccia l'educazione dell'intera persona. La metodologia di insegnamento ludico delle lingue si basa sull'approccio umanistico-affettivo e consiste in percorsi educativi e tecniche di insegnamento delle lingue basate sul gioco. A partire dagli

anni '70 sono state sviluppate diverse metodologie di insegnamento delle lingue basate sull'approccio umanistico-affettivo, che comprendono le seguenti: *Suggestopedia*, *the Silent Way*, *Community Language Learning (CLL)* e *Total Physical Response (TPR)*. Le metodologie affettivo-umanistiche condividono un atteggiamento umanistico e provengono da una psicologia e da una filosofia dell'educazione affini. La metodologia di insegnamento ludico delle lingue condivide gli stessi obiettivi di queste metodologie, in quanto mira a eliminare gli ostacoli convolti nell'apprendimento come lo stress o l'ansia, lavora sulla memoria a lungo termine e considera il coinvolgimento emotivo degli studenti.

Per comprendere meglio le caratteristiche della metodologia di insegnamento ludico delle lingue, è necessario fare un'importante distinzione tra giochi liberi e giochi didattici. I giochi liberi implicano un impegno psicofisico e cognitivo da parte degli studenti, ma non hanno obiettivi specifici al di fuori di esso. D'altra parte, anche i giochi didattici implicano uno sforzo psicofisico e cognitivo, ma a differenza dei giochi liberi, contengono obiettivi di apprendimento specifici. Pertanto, i giochi didattici mirano a trasmettere contenuti lessicali o grammaticali, creando un'atmosfera interattiva e coinvolgente per gli studenti, e sono precedentemente pianificati dagli insegnanti. Infatti, in questo tipo di metodologia il ruolo degli insegnanti è fondamentale, in quanto devono sviluppare la loro strategia tenendo conto di diversi aspetti, tra cui l'età degli studenti, le loro esigenze comunicative, i loro interessi individuali e la loro velocità di apprendimento.

Il primo capitolo sottolinea poi il potenziale della metodologia ludica come strumento di educazione interculturale e di apprendimento inclusivo. Infatti, i giochi possono essere una forma di educazione interculturale in quanto possono promuovere il decentramento culturale, la decostruzione dei pregiudizi e il superamento di atteggiamenti xenofobi e razzisti. Allo stesso tempo, i giochi possono migliorare la qualità dell'apprendimento per studenti con disabilità di apprendimento e rispondere alla necessità di un supporto educativo speciale. Infine, l'ultima sezione del capitolo riguarda la valutazione dei giochi. Poiché i giochi creano un ambiente in cui gli studenti possono dimostrare appieno le loro capacità, essendo consapevoli del loro processo di apprendimento e capaci di evitare filtri emotivi negativi, attraverso l'uso dei giochi è possibile valutare molteplici abilità.

Il secondo capitolo si concentra sull'organizzazione e la classificazione dei giochi didattici che possono essere utilizzati in classe. Il capitolo inizia discutendo alcuni aspetti pratici dell'organizzazione dei giochi, come i tempi, l'organizzazione della classe e il livello linguistico. Gli insegnanti devono quindi pensare a ciò che è meglio per la classe, considerando gli obiettivi di apprendimento stabiliti e adattando i giochi alle varie fasi dell'unità didattica. Gli insegnanti devono anche valutare se sia meglio lavorare individualmente o in gruppo, in base alle esigenze e alle caratteristiche degli studenti. Nel caso del lavoro di squadra, la decisione su come formare i gruppi deve essere presa dagli insegnanti, poiché potrebbe richiedere l'intera lezione e risultare in gruppi con competenze diseguali. Un altro aspetto fondamentale da considerare è se e come stabilire un punteggio. Per garantire un ambiente positivo e accogliente, gli studenti dovrebbero essere premiati se completano il gioco con successo, ma non dovrebbero essere penalizzati in caso contrario.

La sezione seguente prosegue descrivendo la classificazione dei giochi per l'insegnamento delle lingue, dove viene spiegata la classificazione ontogenetica dei giochi. La classificazione ontogenetica divide i giochi in tre categorie: giochi di esercizio (giochi funzionali), giochi simbolici e giochi di regole. Per ogni categoria di giochi, segue una descrizione e i giochi di didattica delle lingue ad essa correlati. Tuttavia, la classificazione dei giochi fornita non è esaustiva e intende fornire un'esemplificazione della ricchezza delle attività didattiche coinvolte nella metodologia di insegnamento ludico delle lingue.

Il secondo capitolo prosegue con la descrizione dei principali tipi di giochi didattici e delle loro caratteristiche. I giochi di ruolo, il process drama, i videogiochi, i giochi da tavolo e i giochi competitivi vengono descritti in dettaglio spiegandone le caratteristiche e le possibili complicazioni.

I giochi di ruolo sono attività basate sul gioco in cui gli insegnanti definiscono un contesto in cui ai partecipanti vengono assegnati diversi ruoli che gli studenti possono incontrare nella realtà circostante (ad esempio, cameriere e cliente). Attraverso i giochi di ruolo si esplorano i significati sociali, cioè i significati degli oggetti, delle situazioni e delle azioni che gli studenti stanno imparando. I giochi di ruolo, quindi, sono simulazioni e vengono vissuti dagli studenti come un vero e proprio gioco con il vantaggio di combinare parole

e oggetti e rappresentano un mezzo con cui gli studenti possono apprendere modelli relazionali e culturali. È possibile distinguere tre tipi di giochi di ruolo: giochi di ruolo completamente pianificati, giochi di ruolo semi-pianificati e giochi di ruolo non pianificati. La loro applicazione deve essere basata sul livello degli studenti e sulla loro conoscenza della lingua.

Il process drama è un approccio all'insegnamento delle lingue che combina il teatro con la didattica e utilizza le tecniche teatrali a fini educativi. Ciò che distingue questo metodo da altri, come le attività di gioco di ruolo che prevedono la creazione di situazioni e dialoghi semi-reali, è che l'intera lezione si sviluppa secondo il principio della simulazione della realtà. Ogni attività di process drama deve essere avviata da un pre-testo, fondamentale per creare una buona atmosfera, suscitare l'interesse dei partecipanti, creare tensione drammatica e risvegliare la creatività e l'immaginazione del gruppo. I pre-testi possono essere di diversi tipi, come miti, racconti, romanzi e opere teatrali. Tuttavia, non si raccomanda l'uso del process drama con studenti di livello inferiore a B1. Infatti, si raccomanda un livello linguistico B2 per garantire il funzionamento e il successo del gioco. Per i livelli più bassi, come A1, si possono certamente utilizzare tecniche di drammatizzazione per l'insegnamento della lingua, come la lettura teatrale.

Per quanto riguarda i videogiochi, sono stati condotti diversi studi per esaminare gli effetti dei videogiochi sull'acquisizione di una seconda lingua e di una lingua straniera, e diversi ricercatori hanno evidenziato il potenziale dei videogiochi nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere. Sembra, infatti, che i videogiochi possano fornire input linguistici agli studenti, in quanto possono facilitare l'apprendimento del vocabolario e lo sviluppo di varie abilità linguistiche. Le loro caratteristiche multimediali e interattive coinvolgono gli studenti e stimolano la loro curiosità, portandoli a usare e assimilare la lingua straniera. Per questo motivo, grazie alla loro natura ripetitiva, possono essere utili per ripassare, ad esempio, le strutture grammaticali o il vocabolario anche per gli studenti che hanno già competenze linguistiche avanzate.

I giochi da tavolo hanno un ruolo centrale non solo nel miglioramento delle abilità linguistiche e comunicative, ma anche in molti contesti diversi, dal miglioramento del vocabolario iniziale allo sviluppo di sofisticate abilità grammaticali e discorsive. I giochi da tavolo possono essere applicati anche all'acquisizione delle lingue straniere, in quanto

possono essere un modo per gli studenti di praticare una nuova lingua in un ambiente divertente e a basso rischio emotivo. La chiave del successo o dell'insuccesso nell'uso dei giochi in una classe di lingua straniera è la scelta di un gioco da tavolo adeguato alle esigenze degli studenti e capace di attivare la loro partecipazione.

Particolare attenzione viene data ai giochi competitivi, in quanto sono i giochi che sono stati svolti in classe durante il progetto di ricerca alla base della tesi. Alcuni studiosi considerano la competizione un elemento di gioco negativo, mentre altri la considerano una caratteristica essenziale del gioco. La competizione può essere utilizzata nell'educazione linguistica per aggiungere un po' di divertimento all'apprendimento. L'apprendimento è di solito associato all'obbligo e alla noia, quindi i giochi competitivi offrono agli insegnanti l'opportunità di aggiungere entusiasmo alle loro lezioni e di motivare gli studenti a fare cose a cui inizialmente non sarebbero interessati. Tuttavia, quando si usa la competizione nell'insegnamento delle lingue, è molto importante che ogni studente abbia le giuste possibilità di vincere il gioco. Infatti, la competizione nell'apprendimento delle lingue può presentare anche alcuni potenziali problemi, come la creazione di un ambiente dannoso, l'ansia da prestazione e la chiusura in sé stessi di alcuni studenti. Se la competizione nell'apprendimento delle lingue è un modo positivo per sviluppare nuove conoscenze e competenze degli studenti, dipende da quanto è ben organizzata e appropriata. Se la competizione è strutturata in modo adeguato, si possono ottenere risultati soddisfacenti. Queste considerazioni sono fondamentali affinché la competizione sia efficace nell'apprendimento e costituiscono la base del progetto di ricerca descritto nel capitolo successivo.

Il terzo capitolo riguarda il progetto di ricerca sui giochi competitivi per l'insegnamento dell'inglese come lingua straniera in una scuola primaria. In primo luogo, vengono fornite informazioni generali sulla ricerca in classe. La ricerca in classe, nota anche come ricerca-azione, è un tipo di ricerca che si concentra sull'insegnamento delle lingue ed è condotta dagli insegnanti nelle loro classi o in quelle dei loro colleghi. Il suo scopo è capire cosa succede in classe e perché, in relazione all'insegnamento e all'apprendimento. Significa che gli insegnanti agiscono, spesso sotto forma di intervento, per indagare sistematicamente un problema in classe attraverso una ricerca che ritengono valga la pena indagare per migliorare qualche aspetto dell'insegnamento o dell'apprendimento in classe. Si tratta della raccolta e dell'analisi di dati per descrivere ciò che accade durante le lezioni

di lingua. La ricerca può essere condotta in diversi modi: osservazione diretta, questionari, registrazioni (audio e video), diari e discussioni con i soggetti coinvolti. Il capitolo descrive poi alcuni progetti di ricerca in classe condotti sui giochi che hanno avuto risultati positivi nell'insegnamento delle lingue.

La seconda sezione del terzo capitolo descrive il mio progetto di ricerca, fornendo informazioni sui mezzi con cui è stato condotto: osservazione diretta, diario personale, questionario degli studenti e intervista con l'insegnante di inglese. Il progetto consisteva in due lezioni di un'ora e mezza in una scuola primaria sull'uso di giochi competitivi per verificare se potessero essere attività valide in classe con un impatto positivo sull'insegnamento e sull'apprendimento delle lingue. La classe era composta da diciannove studenti, divisi in quattro squadre. Le squadre sono state decise dall'insegnante di inglese e sono state mantenute per entrambe le lezioni per garantire un ambiente competitivo ed evitare perdite di tempo. Per creare squadre equilibrate, l'insegnante ha deciso come formare le squadre in base alle competenze linguistiche degli studenti. Per consentire a tutti gli studenti di lavorare in modo paritario, non è stato stabilito un capogruppo per ogni squadra. Ogni squadra poteva quindi decidere il proprio nome. Le quattro squadre sono state chiamate: *Boom*, *Flash*, *I Geni* e *Isola degli Animali*.

I giochi sono stati creati tenendo in considerazione il livello degli studenti e il programma scolastico svolto durante l'anno. Lo scopo dei giochi era l'apprendimento di lessico. Tutti i vocaboli utilizzati nei giochi sono stati presi dal libro di testo della classe. Le lezioni hanno affrontato due categorie distinte di vocabolario: descrizione fisica, abbigliamento e accessori nella prima lezione, e animali selvatici nella seconda lezione. Gli argomenti erano già stati trattati dagli studenti durante l'anno scolastico ed erano stati concordati in anticipo con l'insegnante di inglese. Pertanto, tutti i giochi erano basati su un vocabolario che gli studenti conoscevano bene. A volte venivano introdotti nuovi vocaboli per rendere le lezioni più interessanti, ma i giochi non richiedevano agli studenti di studiare anticipatamente. Durante i giochi, gli studenti hanno potuto utilizzare il libro di testo e il quaderno di inglese svolti in classe sono stati *The guessing game*, *Find the intruder* and *Who's the famous person?* nella prima lezione, e *Wild crossword puzzle*, *Word scramble*, *Hangman*, *Connections*, and *Word-race* nella seconda lezione. Durante i giochi gli studenti venivano premiati con un gettone ogni volta che segnavano un punto, che veniva poi incollato nel cartellone dei punti. Al termine dei giochi, tutti i punti sono stati sommati

per stabilire la squadra vincitrice. La squadra *I Geni* ha vinto l'intera competizione. Tuttavia, tutti gli studenti sono stati premiati con un pacchetto di pongo colorato.

Al termine del progetto è stato chiesto agli studenti di compilare il questionario con la massima sincerità possibile, sentendosi liberi di criticare i giochi se necessario. Alla fine del questionario, gli studenti hanno avuto la possibilità di scrivere liberamente i loro commenti e sono stati incoraggiati a scrivere ciò che è piaciuto o non è piaciuto dei giochi e delle lezioni. Il questionario è stato somministrato dall'insegnante durante la sua lezione il giorno successivo alla conclusione del progetto. Per motivi di tempo, non ho potuto somministrare io stessa il questionario, perché avrebbe richiesto troppo tempo durante la seconda lezione. Volevo che i giochi fossero un'attività divertente e non un test sulle capacità degli studenti. Pertanto, non sono stati effettuati test sulle conoscenze acquisite dagli studenti. Le opinioni degli studenti e i risultati del questionario vengono discussi in dettaglio nell'ultimo capitolo insieme all'intervista con l'insegnante.

Il quarto e ultimo capitolo si concentra sui risultati del progetto di ricerca. Il capitolo inizia fornendo un'analisi dettagliata dei giochi svolti in classe e una spiegazione della teoria alla base della loro creazione. I presupposti teorici del primo e del secondo capitolo e i dati raccolti vengono messi a confronto, al fine di dare una risposta alla domanda sopra citata.

I dati raccolti tracciano un quadro positivo. Sia l'insegnante che gli studenti che hanno partecipato al progetto hanno riferito positivamente della loro esperienza con i giochi. L'analisi dei dati raccolti conferma che la maggior parte degli studenti ha descritto i giochi come utili e divertenti e indica che vorrebbe ripeterli. Anche l'insegnante coinvolta nel progetto ha valutato positivamente i giochi e ha riferito che i giochi possono rafforzare le competenze linguistiche in modo divertente. Inoltre, i giochi sono stati descritti come adeguatamente collegati alle competenze linguistiche che erano volti a insegnare. Le risposte dell'insegnante sostengono che i giochi possono promuovere un apprendimento significativo, ossia una situazione in cui gli studenti sono stimolati all'apprendimento. Inoltre, i giochi possono incoraggiare livelli più elevati di partecipazione degli studenti rispetto a lezioni di lingua tradizionali. L'insegnante ha dichiarato che gli studenti erano disposti a giocare, molto interessati e coinvolti nei giochi, cioè, motivati a imparare la

lingua. Inoltre, i giochi sono stati descritti sia dall'insegnante sia dagli studenti come in grado di creare un'atmosfera positiva e divertente.

L'analisi dei dati raccolti conferma questa valutazione: quasi tutti gli studenti hanno trovato l'atmosfera in classe positiva e l'hanno generalmente descritta come piacevole e giocosa. I giochi si sono rivelati efficaci per stimolare sia la competizione che la collaborazione. Da un lato, gli studenti sono stati molto coinvolti nel gioco e hanno cercato di raggiungere l'obiettivo, gareggiando l'uno contro l'altro. Dall'altro lato, hanno collaborato giocando in squadra e aiutandosi a vicenda, unendo le loro abilità per raggiungere la vittoria.

Le informazioni raccolte supportano l'idea che i giochi siano attività efficaci per l'insegnamento e l'apprendimento delle lingue, ma che debbano essere integrati in classe a condizioni specifiche. In primo luogo, l'insegnante deve conoscere i giochi ed essere in grado di spiegarne chiaramente le regole. In secondo luogo, i giochi devono essere preparati con cura e adattati alla classe in cui vengono utilizzati. In terzo luogo, l'insegnante deve essere il primo ad affrontare l'attività con entusiasmo. Se queste condizioni vengono rispettate, i giochi possono avere un impatto positivo ed efficace nella classe di lingua.

L'analisi dei risultati porta a una risposta positiva alla domanda di ricerca della tesi: se i giochi competitivi siano attività valide per l'insegnamento e l'apprendimento delle lingue. Tuttavia, è necessario sottolineare anche i limiti dello studio. La valutazione si è concentrata su come i giochi sono stati percepiti dagli studenti e dall'insegnante e ha cercato di analizzare se i giochi sono stati apprezzati o meno come attività di insegnamento e apprendimento delle lingue. L'obiettivo era anche quello di mostrare i problemi pratici che possono sorgere quando si implementano i giochi in classe. Tuttavia, la ricerca non si è occupata del processo di sviluppo dell'apprendimento. Pertanto, non sono stati effettuati test post-gioco per determinare se i giochi portino all'acquisizione di nuovi elementi linguistici o al consolidamento di conoscenze precedenti, poiché ciò avrebbe richiesto un approccio diverso. Pertanto, le conclusioni sull'efficacia dei giochi si sono basate solo sulle opinioni dell'insegnante e degli studenti, e non sui risultati dei test linguistici.

A questo proposito, potrebbero essere condotte ulteriori ricerche per indagare l'efficacia dei giochi come forma alternativa di valutazione linguistica. Infatti, si potrebbero creare collegamenti tra le condizioni ideali per la valutazione linguistica (tra cui, ad esempio, la riduzione dell'ansia) e i giochi. Inoltre, l'uso di giochi competitivi ha fornito spunti per ulteriori ricerche sulle lezioni inclusive di lingua inglese. Poiché i giochi competitivi coinvolgono diverse abilità e danno agli studenti l'opportunità di collaborare e aiutarsi a vicenda, un maggiore uso dei giochi competitivi nelle scuole potrebbe portare a risultati soddisfacenti anche per gli studenti con difficoltà di apprendimento o disabilità.

