Full Length Research Paper

A comparative analysis of primary and secondary school teachers' use of games in teaching English as a second language in Zimbabwe

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This article examines the use of language games in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching in Zimbabwe. It compares the use of games in ESL teaching by primary and secondary school teachers. The central notion in this paper is that games, as part of the communicative and interactive methods, are an essential repertoire of a language teacher whether at the primary or secondary school level. The issue of educational level at which games can be successfully used has repeatedly been raised. This paper thus, makes a case for the use of games at both primary and secondary school levels. The article examines whether primary and secondary school teachers employ games in ESL teaching.

Keyword: Communicative approach, Communicative competence, Games, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

The discussion in this article on the value of games in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching and learning in Zimbabwe comes against the backdrop of an observation that some teachers are enthusiastic about using games as a teaching strategy yet more than often they seem to perceive them as time-fillers, "a break from the monotony of drilling" (Silver, 1982:29). Others are of the persuasion that games are more suitable for primary school teaching than the secondary level.

The use of games in ESL teaching in Zimbabwe is premised on the belief that communication is key to learning a language. The culmination of language learning is not merely the mastery of the various forms of language for their sake but rather the mastery of forms in order to accomplish the communicative functions of language. In other words, mastery of vocabulary and the various language structures result in nothing if the learner cannot use those forms for the purpose of transmitting and/ or receiving thoughts, ideas and feelings between the communicator and receiver, speaker and hearer or writer and reader (Brown, 1987).

The communicative approach to language learning builds on the understanding that the purpose of language is to communicate and that communication is meaning-based (Swan in Rossner and Bolitho, 1990). Through the communicative approach production of linguistic forms becomes "subordinated to higher level decisions" that relate to the communication of meanings and the criterion for success is whether the meaning is conveyed efficiently and effectively (Littlewood, 1981:89). In other words, the need to learn a language must be premised on a germane need to achieve certain ends through the language facility. It is upon this realization that Halliday's (1975) seven functions of language are based (i.e. the instrumental, the regulatory, the representational, the interactional, the personal, the heuristic and the imaginative). Other writers like Van Ek and Alexander (1975) have taxonomy that lists up to about seventy different functions that can be taught in the English

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Language curricula. It can be observed this far that communication is part of language learning, that communication is the goal of language teaching and that indeed communication is at the heart of ESL teaching (Edge, 1993). For that reason, the communicative approach places the learner, the raison deter of learning, at the heart of ESL learning processes. The role of the learner becomes that of "a negotiator" and "interactor" who is giving as well as taking (Nunan, 1989: 195). In this way, the learners take responsibility for their learning. Learners stop thinking about the structure of the language and instead, use it receptively and/ or productively (Lee, 1979).

The communicative approach is informed by the philosophy that believes that learners must

...understand the need to integrate skills in order to be able to communicate effectively. Not to work towards the integration of skills poses the risk of producing 'walking phrase books' incapable of using language spontaneously and of generating their own language in response to stimuli (Pachler and Field, 1997:61).

Through the communicative approach, the four pillars of language learning and teaching, i.e. speaking and writing (productive skills) and listening and reading (receptive skills) are taught and practiced in their integrative form. It is for this reason that language games are seen as an important part of the interactive teaching methods that can be successfully used in the teaching of ESL (Petty, 2006; Wright, Betteridge and Buckly, 1884). Games situate learners at the heart of learning activities allowing them to tinker around with language forms. This gives them situational target language practice.

The Communicative Approach

The advent of the communicative movement is generally attributed to the works of Hymes (1967; 1972) in which he sought to disprove Chomsky's notion of competence which he argued was inadequate in explaining how efficient users of a language are, and can be developed (Brown, 1987). Chomsky's notion of language learning tended to limit competence to knowledge of language. A person who had full knowledge of the rules that govern a language system was viewed as a person who could use the language. Hymes argued that knowledge of language rules alone could not account for ability to use that language. His view was that ability in a language should be explained through two processes, i.e. knowledge of language rules and ability to use that language appropriately. In his view, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use.

Communicative competence results from a complex interaction of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences (Kesler, in Miller, 1984). Grammatical competence refers to the mastery of formal features of language, i.e. the codes used in language. This involves the ability to recognize, at the subconscious level, the phonological, the syntactic and the lexical features of a language. On the other hand, sociolinguistic competence addresses the sociocultural rules of language use that define the permissibility of language within a given speech community. The social context in which the language is used defines the appropriate language for that community in question. This means that the social context in which the language is used defines the appropriate language as dictated by that community. Discourse competence, on the other hand, concerns itself with how a series of utterances are connected to create meaningful stretches of language. Strategic competence accounts for the different ways that we use to compensate for the potential breakdowns in communication that may result from either imperfect knowledge of one or more aspects of the target language (especially second language speakers) or that which is a result of fatigue, memory lapse, distraction, anxiety and any other factors that may affect language performances in the target language.

The discussion above points to the fact that the best way to model language learning and teaching is to follow, as closely as possible, the natural order of 'getting' a language. Language acquisition is " a natural, subconscious process that occurs in informal environments when the focus is on communication or meaning" (Kessler, in Miller, 1984:31). This squarely fits games to play this role. Games are not a frill but are "an important element in the acquisition process" (Nunan, 1991:243). As shall be argued in the next segment, games situate the learner at the center of communicative language activities.

Use of Games in Language Teaching

The use of games in ESL is an attempt to ensure that learners are guided away from dependence on the teacher and on the contrived uses of language in the classroom to using language alone and in authentic situations (Pachler and Fiels1997). It should be noted that the purpose of ESL learning should be the ability to use language rather than knowledge about the language. This is evidently a paradigm shift in ESL teaching methodology. As already discussed above, knowing the rules of language does not necessarily make someone an efficient language user. It is therefore, beneficial to approach ESL teaching from the constructivists' interactional and communicative methodology. Learners are placed at the center of learning as active interactants who intervene in their learning. When ESL teaching and
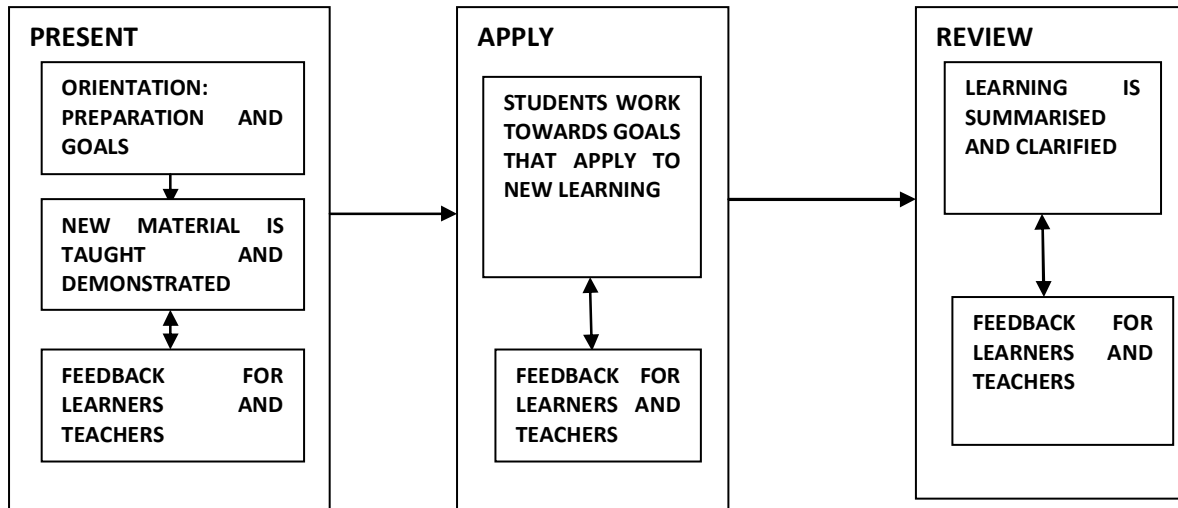
Figure 1: Present - Practice - Exploitation framework; Petty (2006:173). [See also Pachler and Field's (1997:49)]

learning is done through the constructivists' postulations, then the form of language ceases to be the primary framework for organizing and sequencing lessons, rather function becomes the framework through which forms are taught.

Successful use of games in ESL teaching should be based on the Present-Apply-Review (PAR) process (Petty, 2006). Petty proposes that for successful use of games there is need to first of all teach (present) the elements of language that would have been targeted for practice. This should be followed by applying these elements of language during practice which in turn is followed by the review as shown above (Figure 1).

It is important to note that in Petty's framework, the first part where the new language material is taught (Present) is as important as the practice (Apply) part. In the first part, the language material that needs to be practiced should be taught and demonstrated before learners can practice on the language forms. Good dialogue is central to each part of the PAR including the orientation stage. The review stage is equally important since learning is summarized and clarified. This acts as a measure for ensuring that objectives of the activities remain in focus throughout the activities. It is worth noting that this approach to teaching of ESL has an inbuilt feedback mechanism allowing refocusing when activities begin veering off course. Games become quite useful in ensuring that learners get useful practice of the target language. Commenting on the positivity of games in ESL teaching, Lee (1979: 1) notes that
…when attention is sharply focused and the learners' energies are stretched to the full

In a game, it is hard to see any difference between 'work' and 'play' – there is a pleasant, Informal and often relaxed atmosphere favourably to language learning.
Games are not only fun but help learners learn without conscious effort to know language rules that govern the target language. Games can banish boredom and so make for willing learners. They can also lower anxiety, thus making acquisition more likely. They promote comprehensible input since the learners' affective filter is lowered allowing them to acquire the language much faster with less monitoring (Krashen, 1985). Games combine attention with freedom, thus allowing learners flexibility to try out their own set of hypotheses about target language use. Conscious language learners tend to censure themselves in their language production retarding their progress. Reece and Walker (2003) observe that games result in high cognitive development whilst at the same time lowering the affective filter. They further observe that in choosing a teaching strategy, it is logical to make the domain and level of objective that one seeks to fulfill the basis for the choice. In the analysis of the relationship of teaching strategies and the domains of language learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor), games are seen as resulting in high cognitive development (leading to ability in dealing with higher level objectives e.g. synthesis and evaluation) and lower affective problems (leading to less monitoring of language output). As learners focus on the game, they are likely to increase their ability to synthesize and evaluate as they seek to find ways of becoming the victors. This, they will do with less worries of making grammatical errors.

The use of games in ESL teaching and learning creates great opportunities for learners to practice language materials in an encouraging and non-threatening environment. The aims common to all communicative activities, games included, are

…*to have people relaxed and enjoying themselves, acquiring language through natural use, as well as making learnt language more readily available…* (Edge, 1993: 101).

Games are universally enjoyed, and encourage real attention to the task, and intrinsic interest in the subject matter (Petty, 2004). Through games, students can use all they poses of the language, all they have learned or casually absorbed in real life exchanges where expressing their real meaning is important to them (Rivers, 1987).

Commenting on a research they carried out, Reece and Walker (2003: 109) established that in the 'top ten' students' preference of teaching strategies, games ranked number two. Games generally put learners in a situation where they would want to two. Games generally put learners in a situation where they would want to communicate something. They encourage learners to communicate as best they can. Games are useful because they motivate ESL learners. They further the learning process and provide a context for practice and give the teacher information on progress. Games are therefore, "part of a teacher's equipment, not only for the language practice they provide, but also for the therapeutic effect they have" (Harmer, 1991:101). Where games are effectively used the students feel accepted and feel that their efforts are being recognized. For example, this could be vocabulary games in which learners cooperate to build a variety of words from the letters given (puzzle), or a table where they discover words by going across, vertical, horizontal or at angles to build words. For young primary school learners games like those finding the hidden word could increase their word recognition. Learners' "self-esteem and commitment tend to rise and there is increased emotional involvement in the task" (Petty, 2006:95). This leads to empowerment of the learner. Games allow learners to be adaptive and develop their blame-free learning theory. ESL learners would begin to appreciate that ability is not inborn, it is learned from effort and practice which are all within their control. They would thus realize that it is up to them to learn.

Secondary school learners are more conscious of errors than primary school learners. We agree with Wright, Betteridge and Bucky's (1984) view that the enjoyment of games is not restricted by age. Some individuals, regardless of age, may not be disposed to games compared to others. However, so much depends on the appropriateness of the selected games in adult language classes, the BBC (2005) reports that adult

second language learners were not very different from young learners in their preference of language games. Respondents argued that games are useful in adult language classes provided they are adapted to the learner's levels.

We strongly believe that language games are as important a strategy in teaching ESL at secondary school level as they are at primary school level. The most important aspect is to choose games that are appropriate to the class in terms of language and nature of participation involved. Once an appropriate game is chosen, the aims and rules must be made clear to the learners. Games should not be unnecessarily long and should not have lengthy explanations. The objectives of the game must be very clear. For successful use of games in ESL teaching, it is essential that the teacher desist from interrupting a game that is flowing successfully in order to correct mistakes in language use.

In summary, it can be noted that games:
•reduce boredom;
•reduce anxiety;
•are fun-filled and memorable;
•provide a relaxed learning environment;
•increase learning motivation;
•create meaningful context for ESL language practice;
•allow for flexibility and trying out;
•develop initiative in learners;
•lower the affective filter;
•help to concretize concepts and ideas;
•encourage creativity and spontaneous use of language;
•provide practice using language in non-stressing way;
•reduce fear of negative evaluation;
•develop learners' self- esteem;
•integrates various language skills;
•creates cooperative language learning;
•foster participatory attitudes of the learners;
•bridge the dichotomy between school and home;
•promote communicative competence; and
•are learner-contrived.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research collected both qualitative and quantitative data about teachers' use of games in ESL teaching. As observed by Marshall and Rossman (2006:2), "qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in lived experiences of people". It can therefore, answer descriptive, explanatory and causal questions (Eisenhart, 2006) relating to teacher's attitudes and actions in ESL classes. On the other hand, quantitative data was gathered to check on the extent and spread of teachers'
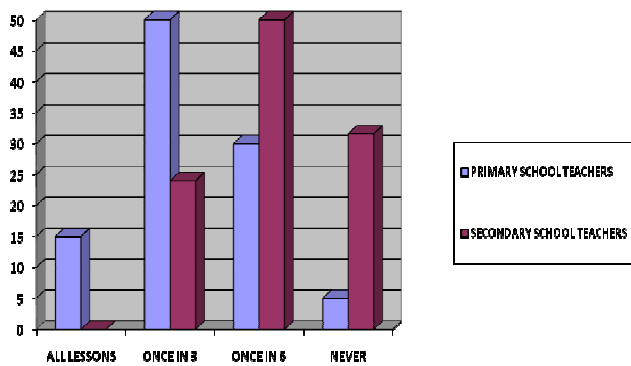
Graph 1: Frequency (%) of use of games in ESL teaching

Figure 2. Language games are suitable up to…level

use of games in ESL teaching.

The credibility of findings was established through 'triangulation, a process in which multiple forms of data are collected and anlysed' (Hendricks, 2006:71). This helped the researchers to establish recurrent behaviours or actions in ESL classes.

Research Participants

Participants in this research were drawn from primary and secondary school teachers. The schools involved are located in two provinces, namely Masvingo and the Midlands. Participating schools are located in Masvingo District (urban), Gutu South (rural), Bikita (rural), Zaka (rural) and Chivi North (rural). Schools from the Midlands Province are found in Zvishavane (rural), Shurugwi (urban), Gweru (urban) and Lower Gweru (rural). In selecting the schools, accessibility was an important factor. In total eighty teachers took part. Forty were primary school teachers with the other forty being ESL secondary school teachers. Of the eighty teachers, thirty-two were male and forty-eight were female.

Data Collection Methods

A total of thirty-six class observations were held in different schools in both urban and rural settings. Eighteen were observed in primary school classes whilst another eighteen were done with secondary school classes. The observation method, not only allowed the researchers to see the activities and behaviour of learners, but also enabled them to hear some of the learners speaking (Flick, 2002). In all cases, field notes were made to preserve data. In addition, eighty copies of the teacher's questionnaire were distributed to the eighty
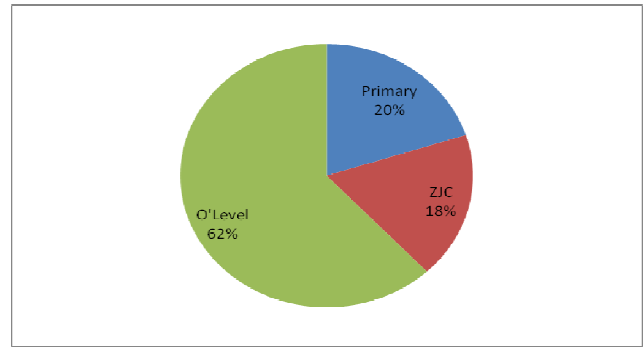
teachers for completion and thereafter collected for analysis. The questionnaire allowed the researchers to convert data into information as offered by respondents (Tuckman, 1978).

Analysis and discussion of results

Once the various data were collected analysis was done. Corbin and Strauss (2008:64) stae that, "analysis involves taking data apart, conceptualizing it, and developing… concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions in order to determine what the parts tell us about the whole." This thus allowed various analytic tools to be used to probe the data, stimulate conceptual thinking, increase sensitivity and provoke alternative interpretations of data. Quantitative data was organized into graphs, pie charts and table for interpretation of teachers' use of games in ESL teaching.

Question 1: How often do you use games in ESL teaching?

The teachers' responses shown in the graph 1 above clearly show their views on whether they think games are useful in ESL teaching and learning. The graph shows that the greater number of primary school teachers use language games regularly as shown by the high percentage of those who use them at least once in every three lessons. As for secondary school teachers, the greatest number use language games once in six lessons. The number of those who never use games is higher in secondary than primary school teachers.

Teachers' views evident in this graph are that language games are more appropriate for primary school learners compared to those in secondary schools. However, this is in contrast to the picture that emerges from the results shown in the pie chart in Figure 2 above.
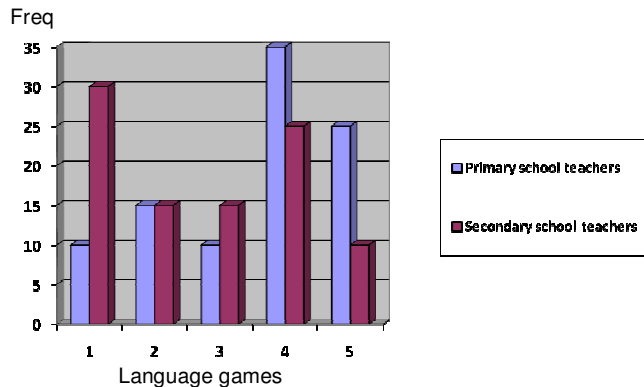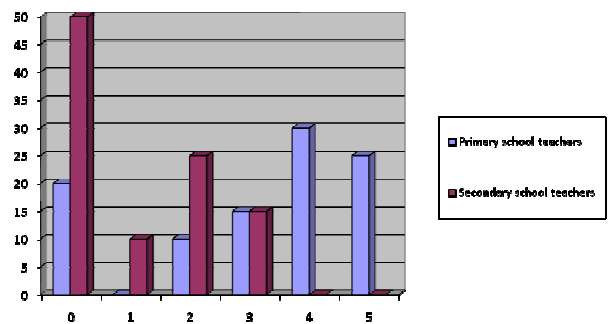
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Graph II: Frequency on identification of games that teachers could use in teaching ESL (Question 16: Language games that I usually use with my Grade / Form ...classes are ...and their pedagogic values are...)

Graph III: Frequency on identification of pedagogic aspects of language games (Question 14: Games are very useful for teaching the following language elements to my students.)

Question 3: Language games can be productively used up to ...level in schools

When teachers were asked about the level up to which language games could be productively used, the majority (62%) of the teachers said they can be used up to ordinary level. If this were a firm belief held by teachers one would have expected to find greater numbers of teachers (in both primary and secondary schools) regularly using language games. Lesson observations carried out by these researchers showed a grim picture for secondary school teachers where it was established that games were rarely used. Teachers targeted for lesson observations were not informed in advance as a measure to try and record data that would be as near as possible to what obtained in a day to day lesson at given schools. Out of a total of eighteen observed secondary school English language lessons, games were only employed in three lessons representing 16.7%. The picture was quite different in primary schools where, out of the same number of lessons observed language games were employed in fifteen lessons representing 83.3%. It can be deduced here that although secondary school teachers may have been exposed to the value of games in ESL teaching during their training, they, however, do not seem to believe that games are essential in teaching second language to secondary school learners. This negative case (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Kadodo, 2010) is quite significant in showing the disparity between professional knowledge and actual practice.

The view above is further strengthened when one looks at the findings presented in Graph II above where fifty percent of secondary school teachers could not identify any language game.

Most secondary school teachers could not identify even up to three language games. None could identify up to four, let alone five language games. As for primary school teachers the reverse obtained as shown in the graph above. On the other hand, Graph III above shows that a greater number of primary school teachers compared to those in secondary schools were able to identify up to five pedagogic language features where games could be productively used. The other end of the scale (Y axes) show that there was a greater number of secondary school teachers compared to primary school who could not even identify any pedagogic uses of language games in the teaching of English as a Second Language.

It can, therefore, be argued that there is a disparity between secondary school teachers' assumed professional knowledge and their actually practice. What they practice shows that they do not believe that games play an important role in second language teaching and learning. This is in contrast to the overall picture shown in Table I below in which most of the respondents indicated that games were useful in ESL teaching.

However, composite responses (as presented in Figure 3) to questions 7a, 8, 11 and 15 whose general theme was, 'Are language games suitable for secondary school learners?' show a high percentage of teachers who were uncertain on the suitability of games for secondary school learners. The pie chart shows that twenty-nine percent of respondents were not sure as to whether language games can be used with secondary school learners. It would seem that the twenty-nine percent represent the gap between what the teachers were taught at college and the current views they hold regarding the use of games with secondary school learners.

A comparative observation of the responses presented in Table I above shows that, serve for question 10 and 11, in all cases the Yes responses (questions 2a, 5, 6, 7a, 8 & 15) and the No responses (questions 4a, 9, 12a & 13) by secondary school teachers are consistently lower

Table 1: Teachers' use of games in English as a Second Language

Question No	Theme	Response Category	Primary teachers (n=40)	Secondary teachers (n=40)	Reason/Justification/Explanations for answers given
2a	Games are useful in ESL teaching	Yes Not Sure No	40 (100%) 0 (0%) 0 (0%)	34 (85%) 4 (10%) 2 (5%)	2b For interest value, retention, recall, mastery and situational language use
4a	Games are not suitable for secondary school learners	Yes Not Sure No	4 (10%) 6 (15%) 30 (75%)	8 (20%) 8 (20%) 24 (60%)	4b a. They are like any other learner hence can be motivated – games improve their participation b. Games may not be so amusing for some secondary school learners who can do without them
5	Improve retention	Yes Not Sure No	38 (95%) 2 (5%) 0 (0%)	32 (80%) 6 (15%) 2 (5%)	
6a	Games improve learners' communicative competence	Yes Not Sure No	40 (100%) 0 (0%) 0 (0%)	36 (90%) 4 (10%) 0 (0%)	6b Suitable – offer situational language practice with less monitoring of speech acts – low output filter
7a	Games should be used to teach secondary school learners	Yes Not Sure No	30 (75%) 8 (20%) 2 (5%)	24 (60%) 14 (35%) 2 (5%)	7b Generally games have the same effect for any kind of learners so long they are tuned to their level
8	Games lower the affective filter in secondary school learners	Yes Not Sure No	22 (55%) 14 (35% 4 (10%)	20 (50%) 16 (40%) 4 (10%)	
9	Game waste learners' valuable time	Yes Not Sure No	2 (5%) 0 (0%) 38 (95%)	8 (20%) 2 (5%) 30 (75%)	
10	Games lower anxiety	Yes Not Sure No	34 (85%) 2 (5%) 4 (10%)	34 (85%) 2 (5%) 4 (10%)	
11	Games lower secondary school learners' ego problems	Yes Not Sure No	24 (60%) 10 (25%) 6 (15%)	26 (65%) 12 (30%) 2 (5%)	
12a	Use them as time-fillers	Yes Not Sure No	8 (20%) 0 (0%) 32 (80%)	8 (20%) 2 (5%) 30 (75%)	12b Games should not be used as time-fillers but for their pedagogic values
13	They are childish for secondary school learners	Yes Not Sure No	4 (10%) 8 (20%) 28 (70%)	10 (25%) 8 (20%) 22 (55%)	
15	Help secondary school learners relax to avoid over-monitoring their speech acts	Yes Not Sure No	30 (75%) 8 (20%) 2 (5%)	28 (70%) 10 (25%) 2 (5%)	

than those of primary schools. This seems to show the decreased number of secondary school teachers who are fully committed to using games in ESL teaching. For question 10, results show a balance in views whereas in question 11 there were more secondary school teachers agreeing with the notion expressed that games lower secondary school learners' ego problems compared to primary school teachers. This odd picture may probably be a result of primary school teachers' inexperience with regards to ego of secondary school ESL learners.

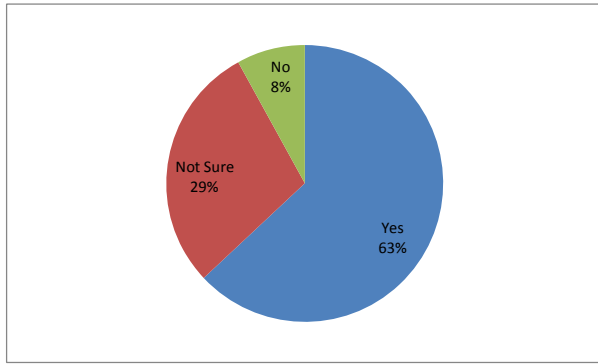It can be observed that on the whole the aim of employing language games in ESL teaching is to allow

Figure 3: Language games are suitable for secondary school learners. (Composite responses to questions 7a, 8, 11 and 15 See Table 1)

learners to use the target language in practical situations. However, as to whether teachers will use language games depends on individual teachers' views. From this research, it emerged that primary school teachers are more predisposed to use games in ESL teaching as compared to secondary school teachers. Teachers' views have a direct impact on their classroom practice. Such views will affect whether or not teachers will employ language game in their teaching. This in turn would also influence teachers' decisions on what they would use the said games for (if they do use them) i.e. to review previous work, checking on previous knowledge of learners before new work, as a warmer at the beginning of a lesson or practicing new language structures.

From the discussion earlier in this article, it was observed that games can be used with learners at various levels of learning as long as they are tuned to the learners' levels. Teachers, therefore, need to appreciate the pedagogic value of games for different kind of learners. In planning the use of games, it is imperative that aims and objectives of employing such games are clarified before employing them to ensure that the teacher has clearly reflected on the whole process before the actual lesson.

We, however, need to acknowledge that many secondary school teachers and students alike, suffer from the pressure of examinations. Where we have such committed teachers and learners we need to clearly respect their views and be able to justify the use of games in ESL teaching in terms of the density and meaningfulness of practice that they provide (Wright, Betteridge and Buckly, 1984).

For games to bring out desired results, teachers should have firm beliefs in the pedagogic value of games. Games must also correspond to the learners' cognition level, age or to the materials that are to be introduced or

practiced (Uberman, 1998). Games should not be narrowly view as time-fillers.

CONCLUSION

This research intended to compare primary and secondary school teachers' use of games in ESL teaching in Zimbabwe. Findings in this research established that primary school teachers are more predisposed to using language games in teaching ESL compared to secondary school teachers. This research also established that there is a disparity between teachers' assumed professional knowledge and their actual classroom practices especially for secondary school teachers. It would seem that despite the fact that secondary school teachers may have been taught at college that language games are valuable in ESL teaching, their neglect of games in their current teaching shows that they do not believe that games contribute in their teaching. It is important therefore to This would ensure that teachers appreciate the pedagogic value of games in ESL teaching and learning. This could be emphasized through second language teaching workshops. As such, a greater number of secondary school teachers may be persuaded to employ games regularly in their teaching to enhance second language learners' chances to improve their communicative abilities.

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