Integrating Learning Games into the Syllabus

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Abstract

Contemporary teaching strategies in Kosovo have become a trend for a considerable number of teachers, particularly those of the young age. New teaching strategies that are being implemented at the Faculty of Education in the University of Prishtina, the institution that prepares future teachers, are applied through different techniques that make the teaching more attractive and more successful. However there are still some university faculty members who consider that including learning games in the teaching is waste of time which distract students of learning sufficiently from the theoretical part of the lesson. This research will present the importance of learning games integration into the course syllabus, their implementation into the classroom and the impact of learning games into developing knowledge among students. Two different groups of students have participated concurrently in this research for one semester. With one group contemporary teaching strategies were used including learning games as part of the teaching; while with the second group more traditional teaching strategies were used without learning games. This research is intended to compare differing learning outcomes between the two groups. Findings indicate that the group where learning games were included has a higher level and quality of the gained knowledge, stayed more focused during classes, absorbed teaching more easily which resulted in better results on the final examination. The group with whom more traditional teaching methods were used was more tired, concentrated less and had poorer results on the final examination.

Key words: Teaching, learning, learning games, studying, syllabus, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

New teaching strategies that include learning games are often considered useful only for the students in elementary and secondary schools. New teaching strategies that include learning games are not considered adequate for the student of university level. Many university faculty members consider the use of learning games during classes and lectures inappropriate, a waste of time, and an undervaluing of class and lecture subject matter. Learning games are considered a waste of time, according to these faculty members as students need more information, assignments and evaluation in order for them to be better prepared in their profession. This research seeks to show that application of learning games within the class at university level

brings more sustainable and effective results among students, instead of just offering them individual information homework assignments and tests. The research presented here used a quasi-experimental methodology, applied to two groups of students. Interactive teaching methods were used with both groups: the experimental group with whom new teaching methodologies including learning games were used; and the control group with whom traditional methods were used not including learning games.

2. HYPOTHESIS

The main question of the research was: "How the application of learning games in teaching process influences students' achievement?"

Judy Baker is a senior faculty member with extensive experience teaching courses in the health fields in a variety of institutions. She told that "I hated lectures- heated, heated, heated, heated, heated them- and I swore when I become a teacher, I'd never inflict them on anyone. Being forced to sit quietly and passively while teachers talked at me was just something I could tolerate. I need to do things. If you give me a piece of equipment to assemble, I'll just start putting it together and refer to the manual only if I have a question. My need to be actively involved in my own learning was the firs major influence on my teaching philosophy…" (Barkley, 2010)

3. METHODOLOGY

During a 15 week semester, 60 third-year students in the Albanian Language and Literature Department of the University of Prishtina Faculty of Education students were divided randomly into two smaller groups of 30 students each.

Fifteen topics each with the same content, assignments for students, evaluation, tests but different teaching strategies were to be covered with each group of students during the semester. Interactive teaching methods were used with both groups throughout the semester. With the first group contemporary teaching strategies, including learning games related to each topic were used. With the second group teaching more traditional teaching methods were used without any learning games.

Each class had prepared materials including lectures and assignments for the topics to be covered in that course. Each week both groups had 3 hours of lectures during the same time periods on different days. The three hours were divided into three 45 minute sessions with an intervening 10 minute break. The experimental or contemporary methods group had lectures on Tuesdays while the control or traditional methods group had its lectures on Wednesdays.

At the start of the first class session students of both the experimental and control groups were introduced to the new topics. In the beginning of class the both groups were interested and attracted to expanded explanation of the topic including discussion and debate, but during the second class session both groups started to become less interested, bored and annoyed.

3.1 EXPERIMENTAL OR CONTEMPORARY METHODS GROUP

With the experimental or contemporary methods group during the second class session learning games appropriate to the topic were introduced with the intention of increasing the student's interest and concentration for learning. In the game each student was directly involved with a particular role or assignment. The learning games were carefully pre-selected to help the students work on problems, gather and share information while working and learning together in a collaborative manner.

The learning games where developed for 15-30 minute segments. With the introduction of the learning games none of the students were disinterested, bored or annoyed. They helped each other work through problems, finding information, and sharing of their experiences without hesitation and having fun together, enjoying learning and the class thoroughly. They expressed different feelings, i.e. joy, encouragement, stimulation than during the first class session. They were persistent in achieving results which were closely related to the information they had to learn regarding the topic of that day.

Different kinds of learning games were used including quizzes, role playing, and rhythmic games, etc. After finishing the learning games students had spent of lot of energy, endless enjoyed learning and were ready to start reflecting on the activity and the topic.

Reflection helped students calm down and have the peace to reflect and integrate what they had learned at each stage of the game. During this time an extraordinary cooperative atmosphere was developed with creative critical and tolerant discussions of the material to be learned and the process of learning including the problems and solutions they encountered.

The third class session starts with individual or group work by students on assignments related to the topic learned in the first two parts of the class. Even though 90 minutes had passed since the beginning of the class students continued to be active, with critical thinking and creativity, full of energy to complete the assignments and preparing their presentations of what they learned.

Usually their assignments took them around 30 minutes. The last 15 minutes of this third class session was reserved for students to present the results of their work which they accomplished through the learning game.

Apart from completing their assignments which required that they remember and creatively apply the information from the earlier class sessions, students gained enthusiasm from working together as a team. They learned to function well as teams and members of a team by sharing ideas, debating, even arguing in a creative and tolerant manner. Their findings and presentations were improved by working together.

3.2 CONTROL OR TRADITIONAL METHODS GROUP

With the control or traditional methods group of students the second class session included discussion and feedback from students allowing them to focus on analyzing the topic and information we shared during the first class session. They discussed in a smaller groups about the given assignments and the tasks they had to accomplish. The control group found it difficult to analyze the material in these smaller groups of students. They debated a lot, but were unable to come to a group understanding or create a consensus of their attitudes regarding the assigned issue. There appeared to be a lot of insecurity, defense of individual perspectives, and speculation without reach as shared understanding. At the end of the second class session they were unable to give effective feedback regarding the topic to show they had learned in the smaller groups or individually.

In the third class session students worked on their assignments and tasks in a smaller groups. At the beginning of this third class session students were tired, had headaches and were stretching. Continuous encouragement and support did not help as the lack of concentration for work and learning was obvious.

During the time they worked in smaller groups they had little patience or tolerance for one another. They approached each other harshly and lacked a sense of team or esprit de corps. Despite working in smaller groups still some of them worked individually, others were silent and made no contributions to the group.
After 30 minutes time to prepare their tasks for a presentation at the end their results were not good. Their work lacked analysis and creativity. At the end of the class all of them were tired.

4. OUTCOMES

At the completion of the 15 week course all students of both groups were required to complete the final examination. The experimental or contemporary methods group showed better results than the control or traditional methods group. For the students of the experimental group the exam was not stressful and they could remember the course information through the learning games they played together.

For the traditional methods group the exam was very stressful. During the exam they were insecure and concentrated on trying to recall individual pieces of information and details rather than the process of

learning they had experienced and integrated for themselves. This traditional methods group had lower results comparing with the first group.

As examples a review of four of the students' assignments illustrates their creative and critical thinking development and achievement during the course. Their first assignment was the creation of an illustration book which they could use to teach their own future students. The second assignment was creating different stories, the third was modeling with recycled materials and the last assignment was resolving of a problem situation. All these assignments are related to their studies and to the topics they will teach with their future students.

Review of these assignments across the two groups allows us to see the impact of integrating learning games in teaching, in the developing of skills and knowledge of students of both groups, especially in developing cognitive, creative and critical thinking.

Messurement of those achievements were conducted according to the Taxonomy of Creative Design (Peter Nilsson 2011). According to this taxonomy there are 5 levels we can use to measure the development of cognitive, creative and critical thinking. "Those levels are:

1. Imitation or copying - as a lowest level
2. Variation (modification of something that already exist)
3. Combination (mixture of two or more ideas)
4. Transformation (transforming of an idea in into another)
5. Original creation - highest level (creating something previously unrecognizable)" (Nilsson, 2012)

There were big differences in the results between the two groups of students. The experimental or contemporary methods group was more successful. In the first assignment "Creation of illustrated book" about 36.6% of the students from the experimental group were able to create an original idea for an illustrated book for children. Fifty percent of them transformed the idea into something new, 6.6% of students combined their ideas with others, and 3.3 % imitated or copied the ideas from others.

Results for the control or traditional methods group were vividly different. Only 3.3% of the control group was able to create and original idea for an illustrated book for children. Only 10% transformed their ideas into something new, 26.6% combined their ideas with others, 36.6 modified their ideas and 23.3% copied ideas from others.

In the second assignment "Creation of Stories" students had their chance to express their imagination and creativity in creating stories that would increase children's interest. From the experimental group about 53.3% of students had their own original ideas, 30% of them transformed their ideas into other forms, 10% of

them combined ideas with other, 3.3% simply modified their ideas and creation and 3.3% simply imitated creative ideas of others.

From the control group only 3.3% had their own original creations, 6.6% transformed their creative ideas in other forms, 16.6% combined their ideas with those from others, 43.3% modified their creation, and 30% of students simply imitated others without being able to create something on their own.

In the third assignment students had to model different objects with recycled materials. Those objects had to do with the topics they were going to teach their students. Even though at the beginning this assignment seemed to be easy for them from the experimental group, only 26.6% of students expressed their original creation in making different models, 36.6% transformed ideas into something else, 16.6% combined ideas with others, 10% modified ideas about modeling and other 10% acted based on what others were doing and imitating what they saw.

From the control group only 6.6% had their original creation, 13.3% transformed their ideas into other form 23.3% combined their ideas in creation of models, 50% slightly modified existing ideas and the 6.6% copied ideas from other in order to model something for their students.

In the last assignment students had to provide a solution to a situation or a problem that had to do with teaching.

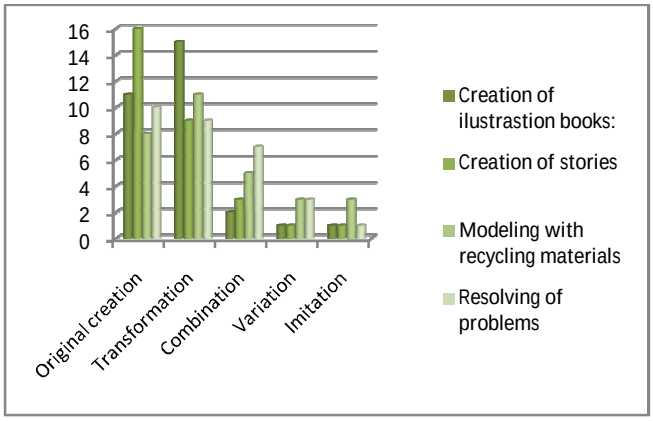
In the experimental group 33.3% provided original and creative ideas about resolving the particular situation in the classroom. Thirty percent of students transformed their ideas into something new and provided good solution to the situation with students in the classroom, 23.3% combined their ideas and had some satisfactory solutions, 10% simply modified others ideas to provide a solution to the given situation and 3.3% repeated ideas they heard from others.

In control group only 3.3% of the students had original and creative ideas about the solution to the given situation in the classroom, 10% transformed their ideas, 30% combined ideas in order to resolve the given situation, 36.6% modified ideas from others regarding the solution to the situation and 20% gave ideas that were already presented by others about the given situation.

Tab. 1

	Experimental group				
	Original creation	Transformation	Combination	Variation	Imitation
Creation of ilustrastion books:	11-(36.6%)	15- (50%)	2- (6.6%)	1- (3.3%)	1-(3.3%)
Creation of stories	16- (53.3%)	9- (30%)	3- (10%)	1- (3.3%)	1-(3.3%)
Modeling with recycling materials	8- (26.6%)	11-36.6%)	5- (16.6%)	3- (10%)	3- (10%)
Resolving of problems	10- (33.3%)	9-(30%)	7- (23.3%)	3- (10%)	1-(3.3%)

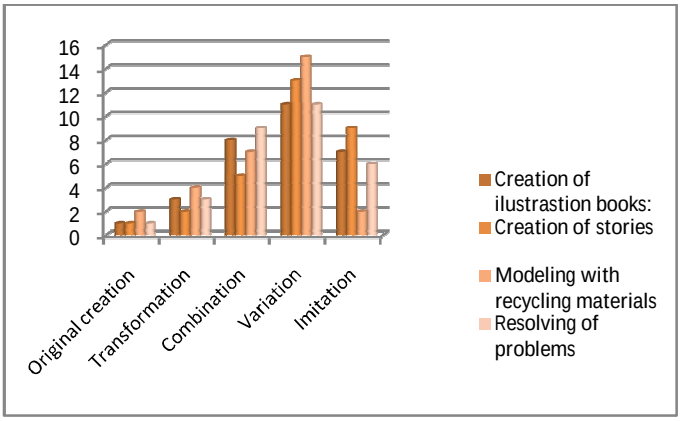
Fig. 1



Tab. 2

	Control group				
	Original creation	Transformation	Combination	Variation	Imitation
Creation of ilustrastion books:	1-(3.3%)	3-(10%)	8-(26.6%)	11-36.6%)	7-(23.3%)
Creation of stories	1-(3.3%)	2-(6.6%)	5-(16.6%)	13(43.3%)	9- (30%)
Modeling with recycling materials	2-(6.6%)	4-(13.3%)	7- (23.3%)	15- (50%)	2-(6.6%)
Resolving of problems	1-(3.3%)	3-(10%)	9- (30%)	11(36.6%)	6-20%)

Fig. 2



These findings regarding their achievement were discussed with students in both the experimental group and the control group.

In those discussions students in the experimental group said that: “During the classes apart from the things we have to learn we had great fun.” “We always looked for the next class as we never felt tired even though we had 3 hours of class each week.” “Learning games help me not to feel annoyed”. “Learning games have helped me to remember things better”. “When I’ve entered the exam I considered I am at regular class and oriented myself like we will have a great game at the end.” “I have learned a lot of good thing even thought my mind was at the learning games we would play.”

On the other hand, in those discussions students in the control group said that: “We had many assignments and they made us tired”. “I couldn’t bear the worthless comments from my colleagues and this has demotivated me to learn.” “I had a headache during the class and I lost my concentration”. “We had no good cooperation as a group; therefore we couldn’t achieve good results.” “I liked the interactivity and discussions during the class but I don’t know why I felt fatigue during the assignments part.” “We didn’t motivate one another that’s why we had not good results”. “I wished I was at the first group as they had a lot of learning games that have helped them to have great results, while we had many assignments.”

After analyzing the outcomes for both groups and review of the literature we conclude that both groups of students where active and had similar capacity for gaining new knowledge. They had similar readiness and commitment for work. What made the two groups differ from one another in the achieving a good results was the application of learning games which was used with one group but not the other.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the outcomes of this research we are reminded that games, including learning games can be an inexhaustible source of pleasure. They help burn excessive energy, giving us peace in which to reflect and integrate learning, encourage the development of team spirit and sound team working habits, increase concentration and recall, refresh and inspire the mind, stimulate logical, creative and critical thinking, and motivate us to achieve complete more with better and more lasting results.

Therefore application of learning games in teaching and learning is sound and useful. They should be applied not just at the elementary and secondary schools, but also with students of the university level. Through learning games students can stimulate their minds and achieve greater results. Learning games can be significant not only in childhood, but at all ages.

“We also believe that as teachers there are times when telling and showing are appropriate, however, students, are most empowered when they are involved.” (Griffing L. Linda & Butler I. Joy (ed), 2005)

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