

The Impact of Using the Language Games Strategy on Enhancing the Communicative Competence of Learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of the language-games strategy on learners' communicative competence in Arabic as a non-native language. It stems from the view that language functions not only as a tool of expression but also as a means of developing thinking, social interaction, and cognitive skills. The research problem arises from the persistent weakness in oral communication among foreign learners despite their theoretical understanding of Arabic, highlighting the need for interactive methods that revive classroom engagement and restore the communicative purpose of language. The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of language games in developing listening, speaking, and interaction skills, as well as in motivating learners to use Arabic in real-life situations. It also examines the teacher's role as a facilitator in applying these strategies. A quasi-experimental design was employed by administering selected language games to a group of non-native learners and assessing their performance before and after the intervention. A descriptive-analytical approach was also used to outline the theoretical relationship between language, thought, and education. The findings indicate significant improvement in the communicative abilities of the experimental group, particularly in interaction and speaking, alongside increased motivation and reduced language anxiety. The study recommends integrating language-games strategies into Arabic curricula for non-native speakers, providing systematic teacher training, and conducting further research on their impact on other linguistic skills.

Keywords: Language and Thought, Language Games, Communicative Competence, Strategy, Linguistic Interaction, Non-Native Speakers

Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for understanding the importance of language as a tool for thought, communication, and education. The significance of language lies in its role as the primary means of human communication, enabling individuals to comprehend the world around them. Language is also a cultural vessel that carries values, beliefs, and traditions, forming an essential component of cultural identity. Arabic, in particular, is distinguished from other languages by being a religious language in a unique and profound sense; it has been inseparably linked to religion just as religion has been bound to it, forming an enduring and unbreakable bond (Jum'ah, 2000).

Language and Thought: A Reciprocal Relationship in Building Human Knowledge

The interaction between language and thought occupies a central position within fields such as philosophy and the human sciences. Language is far more than a tool for expression or the transmission of information; it is the structural framework that organises cognitive processes. Without language, thought remains scattered and transient; with it, it gains structure and clarity, becoming coherent, stable, and communicable.

“The human being is a linguistic creature, and also a thinking one. Because of this, he never ceases, throughout the span of his life, to be a speaker, just as he never ceases to be a thinker. It is as if language and thought are both conditions of his humanity and conditions of his very existence and continuity” (Ayashi, 1992).

Language serves as the essential entryway through which thought is formed and expressed. It enables the transformation of abstract mental content into concrete linguistic structures. Through language, individuals articulate their ideas in comprehensible forms that can be shared, critiqued, and developed collectively. Thus, language becomes indispensable for any systematic thinking or meaningful intellectual dialogue.

Beyond its expressive function, language acts as an epistemic mediator between the self and reality. It shapes our conceptualisation of the world, stores accumulated knowledge, and transmits it across generations. Through language, the worlds of science and literature are constructed, and the achievements of human civilisation are preserved. This confirms that language is not merely a communication tool but the vessel within which our visions of the world are formed.

Hence, it may be stated with clarity and emphasis that language, whether expressed in speech or silence, is the human being's means of understanding himself and the world around him. It is the foundational link between thought, knowledge, and human existence.

Language Teaching Skills

Language consists of skills just like any other abilities a person learns, such as swimming, driving, or typing (Tu'aymah, 2004). Linguistic skills are a set of abilities that enable an individual to comprehend and produce spoken language to achieve effective, meaningful communication with others. These skills comprise listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In the context of acquiring a first language, learners typically develop these skills in the following sequence: listening first, then speaking, reading, and finally writing, as listening provides the foundation for all other language skills.

Core Competencies of the Teacher

A competent teacher must possess three clusters of skills:

1. Personal and social skills,
2. Academic skills,
3. Professional skills.

Madkour (2006) outlined the essential attributes of an effective teacher, emphasising three dimensions:

- a) Specialised Knowledge: Mastery of the subject matter being taught.
- b) Professional Competence: A deep understanding of learners' nature and psychological characteristics.
- c) Cultural Awareness: A sufficient level of general culture enabling the teacher to understand the broader world in which students live.

Integrated Goals of Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers

Teaching Arabic to non-native speakers embodies several interconnected dimensions and goals. These aims can be derived from studies such as those by Dr Tawfiq Al-Hamad (2014) and the Arab Organisation for Education, Culture and Science (2003), as cited in Rashwan (2003). They can be summarised as follows:

Religious Objectives

Arabic is deeply intertwined with Islam; understanding religious texts and correctly performing Islamic practices requires proficiency in Arabic. The connection between the two is inseparable.

Cultural Objectives

Arabic serves as a vessel of culture and thought, as well as a medium for engaging with both human heritage and Islamic civilisation. Today, it is also a language of reading, science, and knowledge across the Arab and Islamic worlds.

National Identity Objectives

Arabic reinforces identity and belonging, acting as a cornerstone for Arab and Islamic unity. Neglecting it weakens communal bonds and threatens social cohesion.

Political and Security Objectives

Spreading and teaching Arabic enhances intercultural communication and mutual understanding among nations, strengthens political and cultural ties, and contributes to intellectual security and the preservation of identity amid global cultural shifts.

Economic Objectives

Mastering Arabic opens broad opportunities in fields such as business, investment, tourism, and trade, especially with the growing economic prominence of the Arab world. It thus becomes an essential tool for professional communication and economic exchange.

Personal Objectives

Some learners pursue Arabic out of personal interest: a desire to explore Arab and Islamic culture, to understand original texts without translation, or to develop cognitive and linguistic abilities through acquiring a new language.

The Relationship Between Language Games and Communicative Competence

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the independent variable (language games) and the dependent variable (communicative competence).

The Concept of Language Games

Husām al-Dīn provides several definitions whose essence can be summarised as follows: Language games are instructional tools used to learn Arabic and master its skills. They are built upon a clear plan grounded in well-studied scientific principles and play a significant role in presenting fundamental skills and concepts, transferring them, and simplifying them for real-life use. They are structured activities governed by rules designed to achieve specific, intended goals (Husām al-Dīn, 2024).

Educational language games are among the most effective means of enhancing the communicative competence of learners of Arabic. They seamlessly combine instructional enjoyment with authentic language use, enabling the learner to engage with the language not as static content but as a living tool for interaction, expression, and influence.

These games are not mere entertainment; they are a powerful instructional strategy that reshapes the entire learning experience, moving it away from anxiety and evaluation and into an enjoyable, engaging environment that builds in the learner a strong sense of competence and ability. The impact of these games can be summarised in the following points:

A Safe and Encouraging Environment

Games create an atmosphere free from fear and threat. Errors are viewed as natural learning experiences, not personal failures. This allows learners to interact freely and experiment without hesitation, thereby boosting their confidence.

Gradual, Achievable Challenges

Games are built on progressively increasing levels of difficulty, providing learners with a sense of achievement at each stage and motivating them to continue with enthusiasm. Immediate success, such as winning or giving a correct answer, provides instant reinforcement of competence.

Developing Interaction and Participation

In group games, each participant has the opportunity to speak, initiate, and express themselves. This strengthens the learner's social presence and linguistic identity. Collaborative work also fosters a sense of belonging and the ability to influence others.

Positive and Immediate Feedback

Games offer instant, non-embarrassing correction, making learning a smooth and encouraging process. Reward systems (points, levels, stars) enhance motivation and reinforce the value of the learner's efforts.

Natural Development of Linguistic Skills

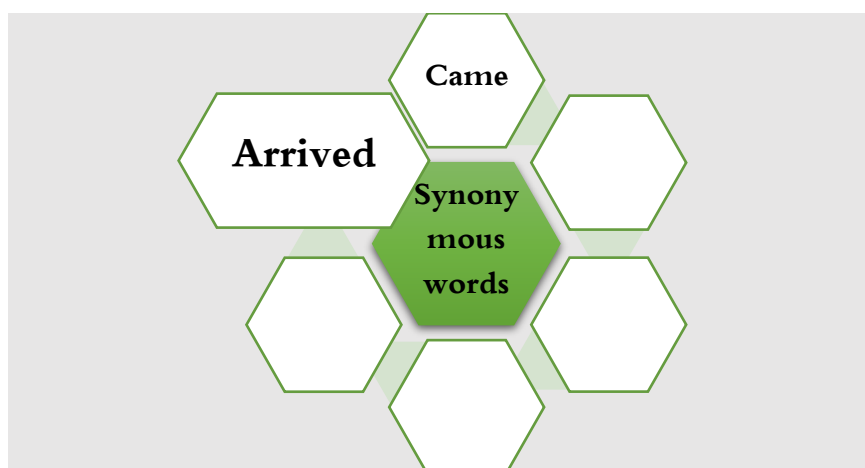
Through play, learners naturally acquire new vocabulary, improve fluency, and enhance their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities, without pressure or boredom. Several studies have supported this impact. Their findings can be summarised as follows: "Educational and computer-based language games foster self-confidence and independence among learners, creating a humanised atmosphere between the learner, the teacher, and the game itself. This environment enables learners to accomplish their educational tasks effectively, especially when clear objectives are present" (al-Hilal, 2002). "Through play, the child learns to assume responsibility, express emotions, solve problems, and strengthen self-confidence" (al-Harbi, 2021).

Language games are not marginal activities; they are powerful tools for building self-confidence and developing linguistic competence simultaneously. They integrate enjoyment with learning, and challenge with achievement, making them an indispensable strategy in modern language classrooms.

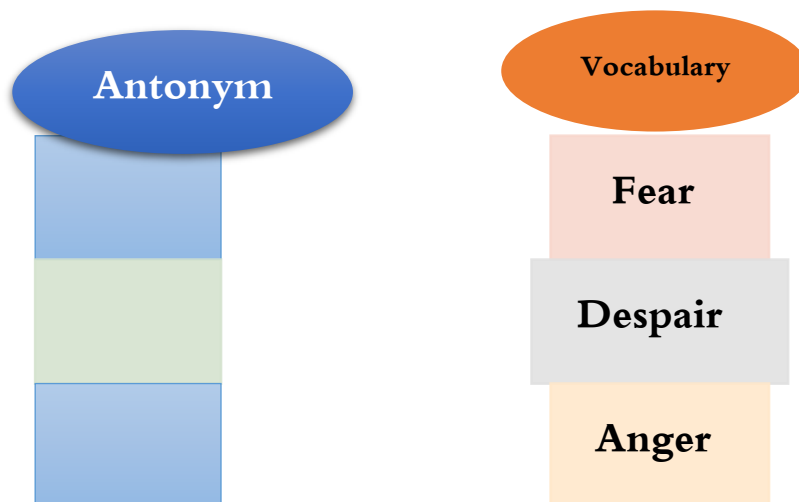
Lexical Games for Developing Vocabulary Acquisition

This section represents the first practical component, where theoretical concepts are translated into concrete practices and activities.

1. **The Synonyms Game:** Learners are provided with a set of separate words or words embedded in well-structured, grammatically sound sentences. They are then asked to produce synonyms, near-synonyms, or explanatory phrases for these words by searching electronic dictionaries. The winning team is the one that produces the fastest and most accurate answers. See the following figure:

*The Antonyms Game*

This activity follows the same format as the previous one. However, instead of identifying words with similar meanings, participants are asked to determine the antonyms, that is, words with opposite meanings.



The Polysemy Game (Multiple-Meaning Words)

In this activity, students are provided with words that carry multiple meanings, such as “*Ayn*” (which may mean the eye, a spring of water, or a spy). Each team is asked to present examples illustrating these various meanings or to identify other words that exhibit the same linguistic phenomenon. Participants may use electronic or printed dictionaries from any linguistic school of their choice to support their answers.

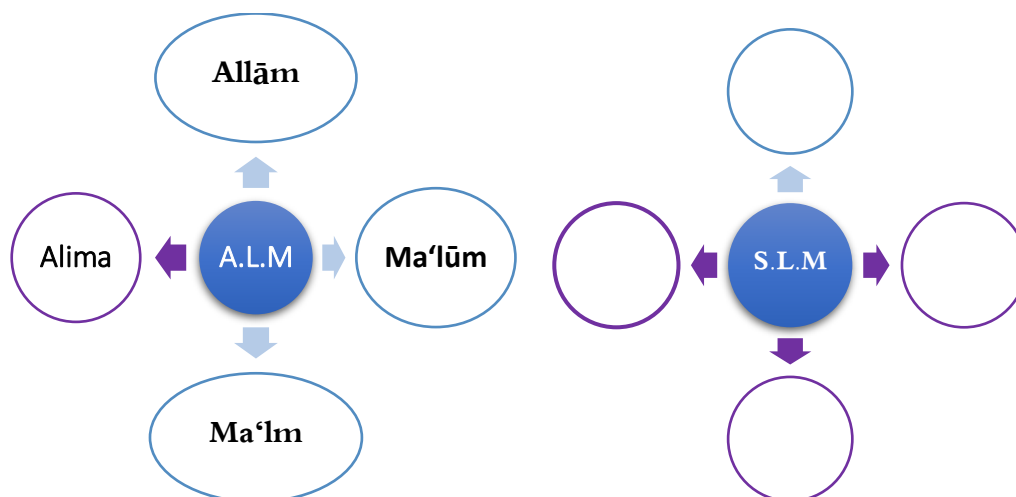
Example	Vocabulary
☐	☐
☐	(Al-hudā bi-ma'nā al-bayān ☐
☐	Al-hudā bi-ma'nā al- du'ā ☐
☐	Al-hudā bi-ma'nā al- ma'rifah ☐

The Colouring Game

In this activity, each team is asked to colour the synonymous words in green and the antonyms in red. Afterwards, the students prepare a table listing synonyms and another table listing antonyms.

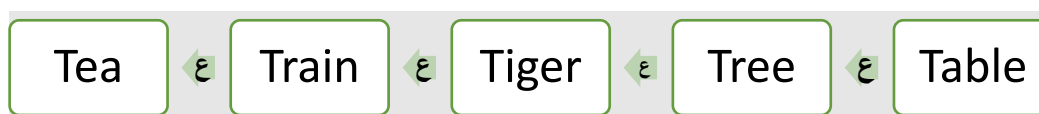
The Derivation Game

In this exercise, each team is required to derive as many words as possible from given roots. The derived words are then to be used in meaningful and well-structured sentences. Students are also allowed to recall derivations from memory, and later they may consult printed or electronic dictionaries for further verification.



The Same-Initial Word Chain Game

In this activity, one member of the first team begins with a word starting with a specific letter, for example, the letter Alif (أ) as in “أمر” (*command*). A member of the opposing team must then respond with another word beginning with the same letter, such as “أكل” (*to eat*). The rule of this game stipulates that no dictionaries may be used, as it aims to stimulate and strengthen memory recall. The team that fails to provide a word loses the round.



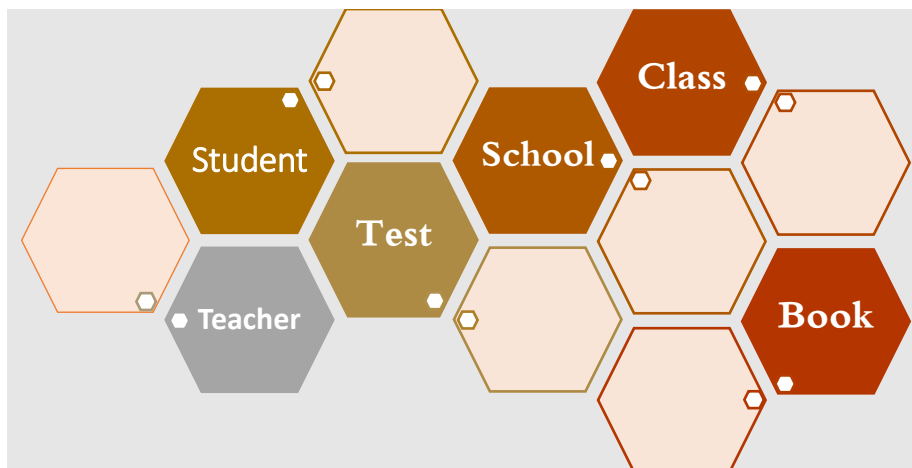
The Same-Ending Word Chain Game

This game is similar to the previous one; however, it focuses on words that share the same final letter or rhyme. For instance, students may produce words that end with the same sound, such as. The purpose of this game is to enhance phonological awareness and lexical retrieval, encouraging learners to connect sound patterns with meaning in a playful linguistic context.



The Semantic Field Challenge Game

In this game, both teams are assigned a specific semantic field, for example: *human qualities, plants, birds, education, clothing, or travel*. Each team is then required to produce a word belonging to the same semantic field. The team that fails to provide a correct or timely answer loses the round. This activity aims to expand the learners' lexical repertoire, enhance their semantic awareness, and strengthen their ability to associate words within thematic domains.



Measuring the Impact of Language Games on Improving Communicative Skills (Listening – Speaking – Interaction), and Comparing Learners’ Performance Before and After the Implementation of the Strategy

This chapter represents the final experimental stage of the study, in which the research objective is empirically verified. Language games are among the most effective modern instructional techniques for making language learning more dynamic, engaging, and interactive. Contemporary educational approaches have demonstrated that learners acquire a language more rapidly and deeply when they participate in authentic communicative situations characterised by enjoyment and reduced psychological pressure, especially the fear of making mistakes. Hence, the importance of this chapter lies in measuring the impact of integrating language games on the communicative competence of non-native Arabic learners, particularly in listening, speaking, and interaction.

Listening is considered the foundational skill upon which all other language skills are built. It enables learners to comprehend spoken language and interact effectively with speakers. It has been observed that the use of auditory games, such as “Listening to the Oral Message” or “Transmitting the Heard Message”, enhances learners’ auditory attention and improves their ability to understand spoken content quickly and accurately.

As for speaking skills, they represent the broadest domain in which language games directly impact learners, as they provide repeated opportunities for self-expression and free interaction in natural communicative situations. Examples include guided dialogue games, role-playing activities, and group games that require continuous linguistic exchange. These activities help learners become more confident and spontaneous in using the language, breaking psychological barriers that may hinder their fluency.

At the interaction level, language games have helped create a positive classroom environment characterised by cooperation and participation. Instead of the teacher being the sole centre of the learning process, the learner becomes an active participant, engaging in role-play with peers. This, in turn, enhances teamwork spirit and develops both social and linguistic competencies simultaneously.

The Results of Applying the Language Games Strategy in Developing Communicative Competence

In a study by Muflih Al-Rashidi (2018), the results of the experiment showed that students taught using the learning-through-play strategy outperformed those taught through traditional methods.

This superiority is attributed to the classroom environment designed to support practical activities that enable each student to participate, engage, and express ideas freely without fear or anxiety.

Moreover, play, collective experimentation, discussion, and the exchange of opinions proved to be effective means of achieving social interaction, building trust, and establishing positive interpersonal relationships among learners. The study also suggested that the effectiveness of the learning-through-play strategy lies in its ability to provide students with information, facts, and ideas in a structured, sequential manner. In addition, the activity-based learning experiences that the experimental group received significantly improved their academic achievement.

To accurately assess the impact of this strategy, the research team conducted pre- and post-tests with a group of learners. Their communicative skills were first assessed before the implementation of language games, and then re-evaluated after a period of consistent practice. The results revealed a remarkable improvement in overall average performance, particularly in verbal fluency, response speed, pronunciation accuracy, and the appropriate use of vocabulary across various contexts. Furthermore, an increase in enthusiasm and classroom participation was observed, indicating a growth in learners' intrinsic motivation toward language learning.

Research Findings

The study, based on both theoretical and field investigations, found that employing the language games strategy effectively enhances the communicative competence of non-native Arabic learners. The findings indicated that this strategy provides learners with broader opportunities for interaction and participation, leading to a noticeable improvement in communicative language skills, particularly in listening and speaking, which are the most directly linked to real communicative situations in the classroom.

The study also showed that implementing language games increases learners' motivation to learn Arabic and reduces their fear and hesitation when using the language in communicative contexts. Through the interactive learning environment created by these games, learners were able to practice the language in realistic situations, thereby enhancing their ability to use appropriate vocabulary and structures across various life contexts.

Furthermore, the research revealed improvements in the affective and behavioural dimensions of learners' performance. They became more self-confident, experienced greater enjoyment and engagement in the learning process, and demonstrated more active participation. The findings also confirmed that language games serve as an effective classroom management and cooperative learning tool, shifting the teacher's role from a

transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator and motivator who creates authentic linguistic situations that foster self-directed and situational learning.

A comparison between the pre-test and post-test results showed statistically significant differences in favour of the group exposed to the language games strategy, confirming the effectiveness of this approach in developing the various components of communicative competence.

Hence, it can be concluded that language games are not merely a recreational tool, but a powerful pedagogical instrument that successfully integrates enjoyment with learning, achieving a balance between the cognitive, affective, and skill-based domains of Arabic language learning.

Research Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study recommends the systematic, structured integration of the language-games strategy into Arabic instruction for non-native speakers. This integration should be embedded within curricula and official study programs, not as a supplementary or secondary activity, but as one of the effective methods for developing communicative competence and enhancing both oral and written communication skills.

The study further recommends training Arabic-as-a-second-language teachers to design and implement interactive language games tailored to learners' proficiency levels. These games should be diversified, individual, group-based, and digital, to align with the specific linguistic objectives of each lesson.

Additionally, the study emphasises the importance of incorporating language-game-based strategies into teacher preparation programs offered by universities and specialised centres. Such inclusion can significantly enhance interactive teaching skills and improve the overall effectiveness of Arabic language instruction for non-native learners.

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