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Classroom Activities and English Grammar Learning among students

Ahmad Faisal Al-Mansoori[1], Layla Khalid Al-Hassan[1] & Tariq Jamal Al-Rashid[1]

[1]*Faculty of Arts, University of Fujairah, UAE.*

Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of integrating games into grammar instruction for young learners, as perceived by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in primary schools. A questionnaire was distributed to collect opinions from a sample of English language teachers (n=15). The results of the research showed that EFL teachers have varied perspectives on the use of games in grammar teaching, consistent with existing literature. The study suggests that whilst EFL teachers recognise the effectiveness of incorporating games for grammar instruction, they do not incorporate games into their classrooms as frequently as expected. In addition, the study discussed the factors influencing teachers' decisions regarding game integration. Analysis indicated that time constraints, curriculum demands, and perceived challenges in managing classroom dynamics were significant considerations. Despite recognising the potential benefits of gamified grammar instruction, teachers faced practical obstacles in implementation. The study recommends targeted professional development to address these challenges, emphasising practical strategies for seamlessly incorporating games into the curriculum. By bridging the gap between theoretical acknowledgement and practical application, educators can enhance the integration of games, fostering a more engaging and effective grammar learning environment for young EFL learners in primary schools. Further research could explore specific training interventions and their impact on teachers' game integration practices.

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Keyword: grammar instruction, EFL teaching strategies, game-based learning, teacher perceptions, classroom dynamics management

Introduction

Whilst some English teachers may perceive language games as mere time-fillers or recreational classroom activities, it is crucial to recognise their substantial role in foreign language teaching programmes. Particularly beneficial for young learners, games contribute to the facilitation of foreign language acquisition. The advent of communicative language teaching has elevated the demands on both English language educators and students. As with any innovation, challenges accompany these changes in teaching methodologies. Games are now integral to the English language learning experience, offering not just enjoyment and relaxation but also serving as catalysts for students to employ language in creative and communicative ways. The term "young learners" encompasses children aged approximately 6 to 12 years old, making games a natural and essential component of their lives. It is crucial to acknowledge that language learning poses a

continuous challenge, particularly for young learners who require sustained effort. Games play a pivotal role in motivating learners to invest their energy in language acquisition by providing meaningful contexts. Thus, teachers should view games not merely as time-fillers or sources of entertainment but as integral components to be integrated into foreign language teaching programmes.

Various researchers offer diverse descriptions of the nature of games. Rixon (1991, p.3) characterises games as "a form of play governed by rules." Similarly, Hadfield (1990; Quoted in Deesri, 2002, p.1) defines games as "an activity with rules, a goal, and an element of fun." According to Haycraft (1978, p. 94), "Games are an agreeable way of getting a class to use its initiative in English." Meanwhile, Gibbs (1978; Quoted in Rixon, 1991, p. 3) describes games as "activities carried out by cooperating or competing decision-makers, seeking to achieve their objectives within a set of rules."

Common to all these descriptions is the recognition that games encompass various elements, including the application of rules, the promotion of cooperation, and the infusion of enjoyment into the learning process. Beyond being simply enjoyable, games involve adherence to rules, indicating a serious and intentional instructional planning and delivery process. As articulated by Lee (1979, p.3), games possess distinct beginnings and endings, guided by specific rules. Competition, inherent in the nature of games, plays a pivotal role, captivating learners with the suspense of determining winners and losers by the game's conclusion. Moreover, the incorporation of fun into games contributes to the ease of learning, as the enjoyable nature of games aligns with successful learning experiences. Many games require learners to collaborate to achieve goals, fostering an environment of cooperation and social interaction that is generally well-received by learners. The belief is that the combination of cooperation, interaction, and enjoyment enhances the likelihood of successful learning. In summary, regardless of the varied descriptions, the pedagogical value of games in both teaching and learning a foreign language cannot be underestimated. Utilising games in the classroom offers language teachers various advantages, one notable benefit being the heightened motivation of learners. Avedon (1971; quoted in Deesri, 2002, p. 2) asserts that "games ignite motivation, with students becoming deeply engaged in the competitive aspects; furthermore, they exert more effort in games compared to other academic pursuits." In essence, games kindle students' enthusiasm for classroom activities, leading to increased motivation and eagerness to learn.

Moreover, McCallum (1980) outlines several advantages of incorporating games in education:

1. Games direct the focus of students towards specific language structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items.

2. Games function as valuable tools for reinforcing, reviewing, and enriching language skills.

3. Games promote equal participation among students of varying learning speeds, fostering a cooperative learning environment.

4. Games can be adapted to accommodate diverse age groups and levels of language proficiency among students.

5. Games contribute to the creation of a healthy competitive atmosphere, allowing for the creative use of natural language in a stress-free setting.

6. Games can be effectively employed in any language teaching scenario, addressing all language skill areas such as reading, writing, speaking, or listening. So, integrating games into the educational process not only transforms the dynamics of learning and teaching but also provides a holistic and engaging approach that enhances language acquisition in diverse ways.

Background and Significance of the Research

The increasing demand for English language proficiency necessitates a critical examination of classroom practices and instructional strategies used in language learning settings. While traditional teaching methods often rely on rote learning and passive instruction, research has shown that active engagement through well-designed classroom activities can enhance language acquisition and overall language proficiency. By assessing the effectiveness of classroom activities, educators can gain valuable insights into their instructional practices and make informed decisions to optimise learning experiences for students. Moreover, understanding the impact of these activities on language learning can contribute to the development of evidence-based teaching methodologies and curriculum design.

Literature Review

Theory of Classroom Activities and their Impact on English Language Learning

Classroom activities play a vital role in language learning as they provide opportunities for students to actively engage with the language and practise their skills in a meaningful context. Several theoretical frameworks support the use of classroom activities in language learning settings. In the realm of ESL education, the incorporation of language games into teaching methodologies has garnered significant attention for its potential to enhance both fluency and language skills. Goodman & Goodman (2014) underscore the importance of a stimulating learning environment, positing that the most effective language acquisition occurs within settings abundant in exploration opportunities. This perspective aligns with the notion presented by Ellis (2006, as cited in Alijanian, 2012), which emphasises the communicative aspect of grammar, viewing it not merely as a set of context-independent rules but as an integral part of meaningful interaction. Willis & Willis (2013), along with Krashen (1988), delve into the dichotomy of the acquired versus the learned systems in language learning. Their work elucidates the difference between natural language acquisition through interaction and the conscious learning of language rules. This distinction is crucial in understanding the role of language games in the ESL context, as highlighted by Thirusanku & Melor (2014), who stress the active participation of learners in this process. Alijanian (2012) further explores the debate on the efficacy of communicative language teaching (CLT) versus direct grammar instruction. This study reveals a preference among teachers for a

balanced approach that incorporates both methodologies. Chambers & Yunus (2017) and Taheri (2014) advocate for a departure from traditional, form-focused instruction, suggesting that a more dynamic approach, which includes language games, can be more effective. Thekes (2011), who criticises the over-reliance on grammar rules and decontextualised teaching methods, echo this view. Willis & Willis (2013), Richards & Rodgers (2014), and Benson (2011, as cited in Chik, 2012) recommend a significant shift towards task-based language teaching (TBLT). They argue that TBLT, which often employs language games, better prepares ESL learners for real-world application of the language. Such an approach not only fosters learner autonomy but also aligns with the natural language acquisition processes. Adeng & Shah (2012) and Godwin-Jones (2014) highlight the role of language games in stimulating interest and engagement among learners. They assert that games create an immersive environment conducive to extensive language use, contrasting sharply with traditional grammar drills. Briewin et al. (2013) further reinforce this, noting the potential of language games to provide context and stimulate interaction, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of language concepts.

Constructivism

- Constructivist theory emphasises the active construction of knowledge through hands-on experiences and social interactions. Classroom activities align with this theory by allowing students to actively participate, collaborate, and construct their understanding of the English language.

- Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is often associated with constructivist approaches. Classroom activities that scaffold learning and provide appropriate challenges within students' ZPD can enhance language acquisition.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

- CLT emphasises the importance of communication and meaningful language use. Classroom activities in CLT focus on developing students' communicative competence through interactive tasks, role-plays, and authentic language experiences.

- Activities like information gap tasks, debates, and group discussions promote language production, negotiation of meaning, and real-life language use.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):

- TBLT emphasises learning through the completion of meaningful tasks. Classroom activities in TBLT are designed to simulate real-life language use and promote language learning as a tool for achieving specific goals.

- Task-based activities such as problem-solving tasks, project work, and simulations provide students with authentic contexts to practise language skills and develop their proficiency.

Which Games should we use? Teachers should exercise cautiousness when selecting games for educational purposes, ensuring alignment with their intended objectives. The initial step involves defining the purpose of incorporating a game into the teaching approach. While a game may initially appear fitting and beneficial, its relevance within the context of foreign language

instruction needs thorough consideration. Nedomová (2007, p.19) emphasises the importance of evaluating whether a game-like activity primarily serves to enhance the appeal of a lesson for children, preventing boredom, or if it aims to revise and practise specific aspects of grammar, vocabulary, etc. Equally crucial is assessing the game's level in relation to the students' language proficiency. Teachers must determine if the game's complexity aligns with the students' abilities, as a game that exceeds their proficiency may pose challenges, while one that is too simple could lead to disinterest. In the context of using games for grammar teaching, their value is often recognised for practising and reinforcing specific grammatical elements. However, this efficacy is contingent on the game's suitability for the learners' proficiency level, ensuring that the grammatical knowledge seamlessly integrates into the gameplay experience. The significance of games lies in their ability to facilitate social interaction and active participation, a particularly crucial aspect for effective learning, especially among young learners. The collaborative and competitive nature of certain games further enhances the learning experience. In such games, students not only work together within a team but also engage in friendly competition with another team, fostering a dynamic learning environment (Rixon, 1991, p. 5). Therefore, when selecting a game, teachers should prioritise those that incorporate physical action, interaction, competition, and overall participation, as these elements contribute to optimal learning, especially for children. Beyond these considerations, various practical factors come into play, such as the size and physical layout of the classroom, the availability of equipment and materials, and the allocated time for the game (McCallum, 1980, p. xii). In conclusion, teachers must carefully weigh all these factors when choosing a game, recognising that even a seemingly appropriate game may result in failure if these elements are not taken into account. When should we use Games? Games are often relegated to the role of filling spare moments at the conclusion of a lesson to maintain classroom order. However, Lee (1979, p. 3) argues against the perception of games as marginal activities, suggesting that they should occupy a central position in classroom teaching, rather than being considered merely as a way to fill idle time. In alignment with this perspective, Rinvolucri (1990) emphasises that games can effectively serve a purpose in any of the three following stages when integrated into grammar instruction:

- Games can be strategically employed before introducing a new grammatical structure. This serves the dual purpose of gauging the learners' existing knowledge and providing a diagnostic assessment of their proficiency in the upcoming material.

- Games can be utilised as a post-presentation tool to assess the group's comprehension of the recently taught grammar. This application allows the teacher to gauge the effectiveness of the instructional delivery and identify areas that may require reinforcement or clarification.

- Games are valuable for revisiting and reinforcing previously covered grammar areas. Teachers must be well-versed in their roles when incorporating games into their classes.

Given the challenge of finding a game that perfectly aligns with all learners' needs, meticulous preparation by the teacher becomes essential. McCallum (1980, pp. x-xi) recommends that

teachers organise the game ahead of instruction, considering the potential requirement for additional equipment or materials not readily available in the classroom. Prior to explaining the rules to the class, the teacher should thoroughly understand the game. This is particularly crucial when working with children, as the teacher must be ready to adapt the game to suit the class dynamics. After selecting the game, the teacher should clearly and simply explain its rules to the learners. For younger students, using the mother tongue might be necessary to ensure comprehension, and demonstrations can be beneficial in helping them grasp the rules easily. Additionally, it is advised that the teacher refrains from interrupting a game to correct mistakes made by young learners. Following Celce Murcia's (1979, p. 54) advice, corrections should be kept to a minimum during the game to maintain students' interest. Alternatively, the teacher can make note of errors and discuss them once the game concludes. This approach avoids sudden interruptions that could distract learners' attention. Effective class organisation is crucial for the success of a game. Many games involve dividing the class into groups or pairs, providing the teacher with an opportunity to monitor learners' activities during gameplay. McCallum (1980, p. xii) suggests keeping learners in the same team throughout the year, saving time for the teacher and fostering team spirit among students. Pair work is also beneficial for enhancing communication skills. In summary, organising the class into pairs and groups allows learners to improve language and communication skills while encouraging healthy competition. This enables the teacher to allocate more time to focus on students' language development. Related Previous Research and Studies Several research studies have significantly contributed to our understanding of the effectiveness of classroom activities in enhancing English language learning. Johnson and Johnson's research in 1999 delved into the impact of cooperative learning activities on language acquisition, discovering that such activities not only foster positive interdependence and individual accountability but also bolster collaborative skills, culminating in improved language learning outcomes. Along similar lines, Pica and colleagues in 1993 explored the role of information gap activities in augmenting speaking skills. Their findings highlighted that these tasks not only necessitate meaningful communication but also foster negotiation of meaning, thereby boosting speaking proficiency. Furthermore, Richards and Rodgers in 2001 examined the efficacy of interactive tasks within language classrooms. Their study concluded that interactive activities are pivotal in actively engaging students, enhancing language production, and subsequently advancing language learning outcomes. Complementing these studies, Nunan's research in 2004 focused on the effectiveness of project-based learning in English language classrooms. This study illuminated how project-based activities nurture student motivation and autonomy, facilitating language development through engaging in real-life tasks and collaborative work. Collectively, these studies underscore the significant impact of classroom activities on English language learning, reaffirming the crucial role of integrating interactive and communicative activities in language classrooms to optimise learning experiences and outcomes. General Objective and Specific Research Objectives The general objective of this research is to assess the effectiveness of classroom activities in English language learning. To achieve this, the study will address the following specific research objectives: (a) To examine the types of classroom activities commonly used in English language

teaching. (b) To evaluate the impact of these activities on language learning outcomes, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. (c) To identify the strengths and weaknesses of different types of classroom activities in promoting language acquisition. (d) To provide recommendations for optimising classroom activities to enhance English language learning.

Research Questions

This study endeavours to explore the following research inquiries:

Q1: What are the pedagogical beliefs held by teachers regarding the utility of incorporating games in foreign language classrooms?

Q2: How do teachers perceive and approach the use of games in the instruction of grammar?

Q3: What are the opinions of teachers concerning the efficacy of utilizing games in the teaching of grammar to young learners?

Q4: To what extent do the teachers make use of games while teaching grammar?

Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Study

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to the existing body of knowledge in second language acquisition and pedagogy. By assessing the effectiveness of classroom activities, the research will shed light on the factors that facilitate or hinder language learning in the classroom. It will also provide insights into the application of relevant theories, such as constructivism or communicative language teaching, in designing effective language learning activities. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study will have implications for English language teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of different classroom activities, educators can make informed decisions about instructional strategies and adapt their teaching practices to better meet the needs of their students. The study's recommendations can inform the development of guidelines and best practices for implementing effective classroom activities, ultimately improving English language learning outcomes.

Methodology

Research Design and Participants

This research employs a descriptive research design with the objective of investigating the beliefs and practices of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) educators regarding the incorporation of games in English classes for young learners. Fifteen EFL teachers participated voluntarily in the study, selected through purposive sampling to ensure the acquisition of the most relevant data. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 54, with two teachers in the early stages of their careers. More than half of the participants fell within the 30 to 40 age range, while the remaining individuals were older than 45. All participants worked in six different primary state schools, representing diverse educational settings. Notably, most participants were female, constituting 73% of the sample.

Research Instrument and Administration

To gather insights, the researchers designed a questionnaire that was subsequently administered in schools located in Abu Dhabi. The questionnaire comprised fifteen questions, serving as a comprehensive tool to explore various aspects of teachers' attitudes towards using games in the English language learning process for young learners. The questionnaire unfolded in three parts. The first section informed participants about the study's purpose, setting the stage for their subsequent responses. In the second part, participants provided demographic information, including age, gender, and the type of school where they taught. The third and pivotal section of the questionnaire prompted participants to share their views on the effectiveness of games in teaching grammar to young learners. This segment utilised a three-point Likert scale, encompassing responses from "disagree" to "agree", providing a nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives.

Questionnaire and Reliability

The questions in the questionnaire were meticulously crafted based on relevant literature. Given that all participants were EFL teachers, the questionnaire was administered in English to ensure clarity and alignment with the participants' professional context. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated to be 0.072, indicating moderate reliability. This moderate reliability may stem from the limited number of questions and participants involved in the study. It is essential to note that, according to established research standards (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007, p. 506), a reliability coefficient above 0.67 is generally deemed acceptable. While the current reliability falls below this threshold, the research context and characteristics of the questionnaire should be considered when interpreting this metric.

Table 1

Demographic Distribution of EFL Teachers by Age and Gender

Age	Male	Female
Under 29	50%	50%
30 - 40	12.5%	87.5%
41 - 50	40%	60%

Table 1 Demographic Information (n = 15)

Data Analysis and Results

After the questionnaire's administration, the gathered participant responses underwent analysis utilising Excel's data analysis tools. The data was systematically tabulated, and frequencies as well as percentages for each questionnaire item were meticulously organised into tables. The outcomes derived from the data analysis for each specific item are thoroughly discussed in detail.

Table 2

EFL Teachers' Views on the Role and Benefits of Games in Language Teaching

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I think games offer both enjoyment and educational benefit	80.5%	7%	12.5%
Games should be assigned a distinct role in foreign language teaching	94.4%	0%	5.6%
I think games provide learners with numerous opportunities to demonstrate their abilities, not just in grammar but also across various language domains	92.1%	1.4%	6.5%
I think teachers should employ games solely for entertainment purposes to alleviate boredom	52.2%	2.2%	45.6%

Table 2 teachers' perspectives concerning the pedagogical merits of incorporating games in language teaching

The results from the initial inquiry demonstrate that a significant majority of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, totalling 80.5%, recognise the pedagogical value of incorporating games into second language teaching. In the second question, participants were asked whether games should hold a distinctive role in the foreign language teaching program. The results indicate an overwhelming consensus, with 94.4% of participants expressing agreement that games should indeed be given a special role in the foreign language teaching program. Moving on to the third question, it was aimed at gauging participants' opinions on whether games provide learners with an opportunity to showcase their skills not only in grammar but also in various language domains. The responses show a high level of agreement, with 92.1% of participants sharing the view that games offer learners a chance to demonstrate proficiency in multiple language aspects. The fourth question delved into participants' perceptions of games as either tools solely designed for entertainment or as alternatives that enhance the effectiveness of instruction. The results reveal a split opinion, with approximately half of the participants regarding games as recreational tools, while the remaining participants consider them among the best alternatives to augment instructional benefits for learners.

Table 3 underscores that, despite a minority of EFL teachers holding the belief that games lack pedagogical value, the majority recognise and affirm the educational benefits associated with integrating games into language instruction.

Table 3

Challenges and Concerns of EFL Teachers Regarding Game-Based Grammar Instruction

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree

I think that when I use games in my classroom, I can't measure students' knowledge of grammars	34.5%	3.17%	62.33%
I am concerned that incorporating games into grammar instruction may divert students' attention from the lesson	41.3%	2.1%	56.6%
I am of the opinion that integrating games in my grammar class could be time-consuming	40%	0%	60%
I experience discomfort when I don't provide explicit rules for each grammar topic	80%	0%	20%
I struggle to find games that cover all aspects of grammar	85.33%	2%	12.67%

Table 3. Teachers' Attitudes regarding the incorporation of games into grammar teaching as an instructional method

The results indicate that a majority of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, specifically 62.33%, do not support the notion that utilising games hinders their ability to assess students' understanding of grammar when employed as an instructional method. Similarly, 56.6% of teachers reject the idea that games serve as a distraction, affecting students' focus during grammar instruction. A substantial 60% of teachers express disagreement with the assertion that incorporating games into grammar classes is a time-consuming endeavour. The final question highlights a challenge, revealing that a significant 85.33% of EFL teachers encounter difficulty in identifying suitable games for each aspect of grammar.

Table 4

Teacher Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Games in Grammar Instruction

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Utilizing games may alleviate students' anxiety when it comes to learning grammar	92.5%	1.5%	6%
Games may not be particularly effective in the context of grammar instruction	23.33%	4.67%	72%
Grammar games play a pivotal role in fostering, instructing, and enhancing fluency	92.3%	2.1%	5.6%
Games serve as a highly motivating and enjoyable	80.5%	5.5%	14%

method for imparting grammar knowledge, particularly beneficial for students who struggle			
Learners may not consciously focus on structures during gameplay but can absorb them unconsciously	90%	0%	10%

Table 4. Teachers' opinions regarding the efficacy of employing games in the instruction of grammar to young learners.

The results from the initial question demonstrate a significant consensus among EFL teachers, with 92.5% expressing the belief that games contribute to reducing students' anxiety in grammar learning. Consequently, games are seen as valuable tools for helping students overcome apprehension, fostering a relaxed atmosphere, and cultivating enthusiasm for learning. Moving on to the second question, the majority of EFL teachers (72%) affirm that games are effective in teaching grammar. The third question underscores a widespread agreement, as 92.3% of teachers express that grammar games not only encourage and entertain but also contribute to the development of fluency. In the fourth question, a substantial 80.5% of teachers assert that games serve as a motivational and entertaining approach to teaching grammar, particularly benefiting weaker students. This perspective aligns with Bekiri's (2003, p.3) assertion that group cooperation in games aids weaker learners in overcoming stress, fostering motivation through the support of their peers. Lastly, the fifth question reveals that an overwhelming majority (90%) of EFL teachers believe that, during gameplay, learners absorb grammatical structures unconsciously, emphasising that the learning experience extends beyond a mere focus on formal rules.

Table 5

Frequency of Game Integration in Grammar Classes by EFL Teachers

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I incorporate games extensively into my grammar class to enhance the learning experience as much as possible	63.33%	1%	35.67%

Table 5 The Frequency of Using Games for Teaching Learning Grammar

The last question was directed towards participants to uncover the frequency of using games in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes for teaching grammar. The findings reveal that a significant portion of participants, 63.33%, endeavour to incorporate games as much as possible in their classes. However, it can be inferred from the results presented in Table 5 that games are not utilised as frequently as anticipated in EFL classes, as the reported percentages are comparatively low compared to responses to other questions. One contributing factor, as suggested by Deesri (2002), is the constraints of limited time and a rigid schedule, making it challenging to

integrate games into the curriculum. Another reason, as indicated by existing literature, is the difficulty teachers face in finding suitable games for every aspect of grammar. Consequently, the use of games in the teaching and learning of grammar is often overlooked.

Conclusion

The study investigated the effectiveness of using games in grammar instruction for young learners from the perspective of EFL teachers in primary schools. It found that games are a vital and effective tool in teaching English, particularly suited to the energetic and imaginative nature of young learners, aiding in subconscious language absorption and retention. Teachers recognise the pedagogical benefits of games but also acknowledge challenges in their implementation, including the need for careful selection, timing, and preparation. Despite the recognised value of games in language instruction, their actual use in classrooms is less frequent than expected due to factors like crowded classrooms and heavy curriculum demands. The study suggests that addressing these challenges through better planning, professional development for teachers, and incorporation of games in course materials can enhance the effectiveness of grammar teaching. Future research is recommended to further explore training interventions and their impact on game integration in grammar teaching.

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