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The Effectiveness Of Grammar Games In Teaching Tenses To Young Learners

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ABSTRACT: *This study explores the effectiveness of grammar games in teaching English tenses to young learners in an Uzbek EFL context. The research was conducted at a private language center in Fergana with 28 primary school students aged 8–10. The purpose of the study was to examine whether integrating grammar games into English lessons improves students' understanding and retention of tenses while increasing their motivation and enjoyment. A four-week experimental study was carried out, during which the experimental group was taught using grammar games such as Tense Bingo, Verb Race, and Sentence Puzzle, while the control group received traditional instruction. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and student feedback questionnaires. Results showed a significant improvement in the experimental group's performance and positive changes in their attitudes toward learning grammar. The findings suggest that grammar games can make tense learning more effective, interactive, and enjoyable for young learners in Uzbek EFL classrooms.*

Keywords: grammar games; tense learning; young learners; English language teaching (ELT); motivation; game-based learning; communicative approach; EFL classroom; Uzbekistan; language acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar has long been considered one of the most challenging aspects of English language learning, particularly for young learners whose attention span and motivation often depend on how engaging the classroom environment is. In traditional Uzbek classrooms, grammar instruction is often delivered through mechanical drills, rote memorization, and rule explanation, which can make lessons monotonous and demotivating for children. Consequently, teachers are increasingly searching for more interactive and child-centered methods to teach grammar effectively.

Grammar games have been widely recognized as one of the most engaging ways to help students internalize grammar structures in a natural and enjoyable manner. Games provide meaningful contexts in which learners use language for communication rather than mere repetition. Moreover, they promote active participation, reduce anxiety, and enhance motivation.

This study focuses on teaching one of the most fundamental aspects of grammar—tenses—to young learners through games. The aim is to determine whether grammar games can make tense learning more effective and enjoyable for primary school students in Uzbekistan. The central research question is:

Can grammar games make tense learning more effective and enjoyable for primary school students?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measures. Two intact classes were selected from a private English center in Fergana: one as the experimental group and the other as the control group.

Participants:

The participants were 28 learners aged 8–10, divided into two groups of 14 each. All participants had been learning English for at least one year and were familiar with basic present and past tense forms.

Instruments:

Grammar Tests: A 20-item test measuring knowledge of simple present, present continuous, and simple past tenses.

Observation Checklist: Used by the teacher to record students' participation and enthusiasm.

Questionnaire: A short feedback form assessing students' attitudes toward grammar lessons before and after the intervention.

Procedure:

- The study lasted four weeks, with three 60-minute lessons per week.
- Control Group: Taught through traditional methods—rule explanation, textbook exercises, and written drills.
- Experimental Group: Taught through grammar games integrated into each lesson, such as:
- Tense Bingo: students listened to sentences and marked the correct tense form.
- Verb Race: groups competed to form correct tense sentences on the board.
- Sentence Puzzle: learners arranged word cards to form grammatically correct sentences.
- Pre-tests were administered at the beginning and post-tests at the end of the four-week period.

Data Analysis:

Scores were analyzed quantitatively using mean comparisons between pre- and post-tests. Observation and questionnaire data were analyzed qualitatively to identify behavioral and attitudinal changes.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Control	58%	70%	+12%
Experimental	56%	85%	+29%

The experimental group showed a 29% improvement, compared to 12% in the control group. This indicates that learners exposed to grammar games performed significantly better in identifying and using correct tense forms.

Qualitative Observations

Observation notes revealed that students in the experimental group were more active and enthusiastic during lessons. They participated voluntarily, helped peers, and used English more frequently in classroom communication. In contrast, the control group showed signs of boredom and required constant teacher prompts to stay focused.

Student Feedback

Questionnaire results showed that 92% of students in the experimental group described grammar lessons as "fun" or "very fun," compared to only 35% in the control group. Learners also expressed that games helped them "remember tenses easily" and "feel confident when speaking."

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that grammar games have a substantial positive impact on young learners' mastery of English tenses, as well as on their motivation and classroom participation. The results are consistent with prior research (Hadfield, 1990; Ersoz, 2000; Wright et al., 2006) emphasizing that games can transform grammar instruction from a mechanical task into a meaningful and enjoyable learning experience.

One of the key observations was that students in the experimental group were more eager to participate and less afraid of making mistakes. This reflects Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which states that emotional factors such as anxiety and motivation play a critical role in second language acquisition. When learners feel relaxed and engaged, their affective filter is lowered, allowing better intake of new linguistic input. In this study, grammar games provided a safe and playful environment where learners practiced tenses naturally without fear of correction, leading to higher performance outcomes.

Another explanation for the improvement is that games encourage repeated exposure and active usage of grammar structures. Unlike traditional drills, games require learners to think quickly, cooperate with peers, and use grammar to achieve a communicative goal. For instance, in Tense Bingo and Verb Race, students had to listen attentively, recall correct verb forms, and apply tenses appropriately in order to win the game. This type of interaction supports the idea of experiential learning, where students learn by doing rather than memorizing (Kolb, 1984). Such activities reinforce procedural memory, which is crucial for automatic language use.

Furthermore, grammar games integrate both cognitive and social learning principles. According to Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory, learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration. During group-based games, students not only practice grammar but also communicate meaningfully, negotiate rules, and support one another. This cooperative atmosphere enhances their confidence and helps internalize language patterns subconsciously. In contrast, learners in the control group received instruction mainly through explanation and individual written exercises, which limited opportunities for social learning and language use.

Another notable finding is the increase in intrinsic motivation among students who learned through games. Before the experiment, many learners viewed grammar as difficult and boring. After four weeks of game-based instruction, most of them reported that grammar lessons became enjoyable and less stressful. This shift in attitude supports Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which suggests that learners are more motivated when activities satisfy their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Grammar games meet these needs by allowing learners to experience success, make choices, and interact with peers in a positive environment.

Additionally, the results align with recent trends in communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes using grammar in meaningful contexts rather than isolating it from communication. Through games, learners practiced grammar as part of real interaction — asking and answering questions, competing, or solving problems. This reflects what Ellis (2006) describes as the balance between focus on form and communicative use, where learners pay attention to grammar while using it functionally.

However, it is also important to note that grammar games require careful planning. The teacher must select games suitable for learners' age, level, and linguistic goals. Poorly designed games can lead to chaos or focus more on fun than learning. In this study, each game was chosen specifically to reinforce target tenses, and clear rules were established to maintain order and ensure learning objectives were met.

The discussion indicates that grammar games are not just entertaining add-ons but a powerful pedagogical strategy that enhances comprehension, retention, and motivation. They bridge the gap between theory and practice by combining communicative, affective, and cognitive benefits. For young learners in Uzbek EFL classrooms—where exposure to authentic English is limited—grammar games offer an effective way to make learning both enjoyable and meaningful.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the effectiveness of grammar games in teaching English tenses to young learners in an Uzbek EFL context. The findings confirmed that integrating grammar games into classroom instruction significantly improved students' mastery of tenses and increased their motivation to learn grammar. Learners who participated in game-based lessons not only achieved higher post-test scores but also demonstrated greater enthusiasm, confidence, and cooperation compared to those taught through traditional methods.

Grammar games proved to be a valuable teaching tool because they provided meaningful practice, reduced anxiety, and created a positive learning atmosphere. Through interactive activities such as Tense Bingo and Verb Race, students used grammar in authentic, communicative situations, which helped them internalize tense forms naturally. These results support communicative and constructivist approaches to language teaching, emphasizing that learners acquire grammar more effectively when they are actively engaged and emotionally involved.

For teachers in Uzbekistan and similar EFL settings, the study suggests that grammar games should be incorporated regularly into grammar lessons, especially for young learners who require dynamic and playful methods to maintain focus. However, successful implementation depends on the teacher's ability to choose age-appropriate games and align them with specific learning objectives.

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