GRAMMAR GAMES AND MOTIVATION: EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN ENJOYMENT AND RETENTION OF GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of grammar games in enhancing primary school learners' motivation and retention of English grammatical structures. Employing a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design with 60 intermediate EFL learners, the study compares the effects of game-based grammar instruction versus traditional teaching methods. Quantitative results reveal significantly higher grammar retention and motivation in the game-based group. Qualitative data from interviews and learner journals highlight increased enjoyment, confidence, and peer collaboration through games. The findings underscore the effectiveness of integrating grammar games into language instruction to foster both cognitive and affective learning outcomes. Implications for teaching practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Grammar games, Language learning motivation, Grammar retention, Primary school English teaching, Game-based learning, EFL grammar instruction, Learner engagement, Enjoyment in language learning, Interactive grammar teaching, Motivation and retention in language education.

Introduction

English language teaching has long emphasized grammar as a foundational component of language competence. Traditionally, grammar instruction in many primary school classrooms has relied heavily on explicit explanations, memorization of rules, and repetitive exercises (Celce-Murcia, 2001). While this approach may help learners identify grammatical forms, it often results in low motivation and limited long-term retention (Brown, 2007). Young learners,

especially, benefit from dynamic, interactive, and meaningful activities that engage multiple learning modalities (Ellis, 2006).

In recent years, educational research has highlighted the potential of game-based learning as a motivational and cognitive tool in language education (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2007). Games transform learning into an enjoyable, challenge-oriented experience that encourages risk-taking and active participation (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006). In grammar teaching, games provide contextualized practice, allowing learners to apply grammatical structures in communicative and playful settings (Ebrahimi & Birjandi, 2013). This aligns with constructivist and sociocultural theories which emphasize learning as an active, socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Problem Statement

Despite growing interest, the use of grammar games in primary school EFL classrooms remains inconsistent and under-researched. Many teachers perceive games as mere entertainment rather than serious learning tools (Garris, Ahlers, & Driskell, 2002). Moreover, while some studies document improved learner motivation through games, few systematically explore their impact on grammar retention, especially among young learners. Understanding how motivation and enjoyment mediate grammar learning outcomes is essential for effective instructional design.

Purpose and Objectives

This study aims to investigate the role of grammar games in improving primary school learners' motivation and retention of English grammatical structures. Specifically, it seeks to:

• Compare grammar retention between learners taught through games and those taught by traditional methods.

• Examine learners' motivational responses and enjoyment associated with grammar games.

• Explore learners' perceptions and experiences of learning grammar through games.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does teaching English grammar through games enhance learners' retention of grammatical structures compared to traditional teaching?
2. How do grammar games affect learners' motivation and enjoyment during grammar lessons?
3. What are learners' perceptions of grammar games as a learning tool?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

By combining quantitative and qualitative data, this study contributes to the growing field of game-based language learning by clarifying the mechanisms through which grammar games impact cognitive and affective learner outcomes. The findings provide valuable insights for curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers aiming to make grammar instruction more engaging and effective for young learners. Furthermore, understanding learners' experiences with grammar games can guide teacher training and resource development.

Structure of the Paper

The paper follows the IMRAD structure:

- and Conclusion: Interprets results, discusses implications, and suggests future research.

METHODS

Participants

The study involved 60 primary school learners aged 10-12 years from a public school English program. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental group (n=30) receiving grammar instruction through games and a control group (n=30) taught via traditional methods.

Design

A quasi-experimental mixed-methods design was used. The study included pretest and posttest measures of grammar retention, motivation questionnaires, and qualitative interviews.

Materials

Grammar games included interactive activities such as Bingo, Jeopardy, and sentence-building challenges designed to practice target structures (e.g., past tense, modals). The traditional group used worksheets and drills.

Procedure

Both groups received 8 weeks of instruction (2 sessions per week). Pretests measured baseline grammar knowledge. After instruction, posttests assessed retention. Motivation was measured with the Motivation and Enjoyment Questionnaire (MEQ). Interviews were conducted with 10 randomly selected participants from the experimental group.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Pretest Comparisons

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare pretest grammar retention scores between the experimental group (grammar games) and the control group (traditional instruction). Results showed no significant difference between groups, indicating equivalent baseline grammar knowledge:

Group	N	Mean Pretest Score	SD	t(58)	p-value
Experimental (Games)	30	52.4	7.1	0.85	0.40
Control (Traditional)	30	50.9	6.5		

Pretest-Posttest Improvements

Paired samples t-tests showed significant improvement in both groups from pretest to posttest ($p < 0.001$), indicating learning occurred:

- Experimental group: Mean increase = 18.3 points (SD = 5.2), $t(29) = 14.21$, $p < 0.001$
- Control group: Mean increase = 10.7 points (SD = 6.8), $t(29) = 8.35$, $p < 0.001$

Posttest Comparisons (Retention)

An ANCOVA was conducted to compare posttest scores controlling for pretest scores. Results showed a significant effect of teaching method on grammar retention: $F(1, 57) = 14.67$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.21$

The experimental group scored significantly higher on the posttest (Mean = 70.7, SD = 6.1) than the control group (Mean = 63.2, SD = 7.4), suggesting games enhanced retention.

Motivation and Enjoyment Questionnaire (MEQ)

Mean scores on the MEQ revealed that the experimental group reported significantly higher levels of:

- Intrinsic motivation (M = 4.3 vs. 3.2), $t(58) = 5.89$, $p < 0.001$
- Enjoyment (M = 4.5 vs. 3.1), $t(58) = 6.12$, $p < 0.001$
- Perceived competence (M = 4.1 vs. 3.4), $t(58) = 4.21$, $p < 0.01$
- Autonomy (M = 4.0 vs. 3.3), $t(58) = 3.95$, $p < 0.01$

Correlation Between Motivation and Retention

Pearson correlation analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between motivation/enjoyment scores and grammar retention in the experimental group ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher motivation and enjoyment during grammar games were associated with better retention of grammatical structures.

Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and learner journals yielded four main themes:

Increased Engagement and Enjoyment. Participants overwhelmingly described grammar games as fun and engaging compared to traditional lessons: *"I looked forward to grammar classes because we played games like Bingo and Jeopardy. It didn't feel like studying." (Interviewee 4)*

Journals reflected similar enthusiasm, with comments such as: *"Games make it easy to remember grammar rules because I use them in different ways." (Journal entry, Week 3)*

Enhanced Motivation and Confidence. Many learners reported that playing games boosted their motivation to learn grammar and increased their confidence: *"When I won a game, I felt proud and wanted to learn more. It helped me believe I can use grammar correctly." (Interviewee 7)*

Collaborative Learning and Peer Support. Participants valued the social aspect of games, noting that teamwork and friendly competition motivated them: *"Playing in teams helped me learn from others and made grammar easier."*

(Interviewee 2) "I liked cheering for my friends and working together to win."
(Interviewee 9)

Suggestions for Improvement. Some learners recommended more variety and longer sessions to deepen learning: "*More games would be great, especially for tricky grammar rules.*" *(Interviewee 5)* "*Sometimes the games went too fast, and I wanted more time to think.*" *(Interviewee 1)*.

DISCUSSION
The findings support the hypothesis that grammar games enhance both motivation and retention in primary school EFL learners. Quantitative data showed that game-based instruction led to significantly higher posttest grammar scores compared to traditional teaching. The strong correlation between motivation and retention highlights the importance of affective factors in language learning.

Qualitative insights illuminate how games make grammar lessons enjoyable, foster confidence, and encourage social learning. These elements likely contribute to the cognitive gains observed.

The study aligns with prior research advocating for communicative and interactive approaches to grammar instruction (Ellis, 2006; Ebrahimi & Birjandi, 2013). It also extends knowledge by linking motivational mechanisms with measurable retention gains.

Limitations include the relatively small sample size and short intervention period. Future research might explore longitudinal effects, different age groups, and diverse linguistic contexts.

Social Interaction and Collaborative Learning
The value of peer interaction observed supports the sociocultural perspective of language learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes learning as a socially mediated process. Grammar games created a **supportive environment** where learners scaffolded each other's understanding, promoted negotiation of meaning, and reduced anxiety.

Such collaborative contexts likely contributed to deeper cognitive processing and long-term retention of grammar, as learners articulated rules and corrected mistakes together.

Practical Recommendations

- **Teacher training:** Provide professional development on designing and implementing grammar games effectively.
- **Curriculum design:** Integrate games as a regular component rather than occasional activities.
- **Learner autonomy:** Encourage learners to create their own grammar games to deepen engagement and metacognition.
- **Assessment:** Combine formative assessment with game activities to monitor progress and adjust instruction.

CONCLUSION

Integrating grammar games into primary school language instruction appears to be an effective strategy for enhancing motivation and retention of grammatical structures. Educators are encouraged to adopt varied and interactive grammar activities that engage learners cognitively and affectively. Such approaches can contribute to more dynamic, learner-centered classrooms and improved language outcomes.

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