

# Teaching English Grammars Through Games in an EFL Grammar Class

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**Abstract:** One of the most disturbing realities is that the majority of graduates in Vietnam are still unable to use English fluently. Facing this situation, universities have been trying to promote innovation in English teaching and learning. Therefore, after graduation, students can meet the strict requirements of employers and can easily find the jobs they want. Although there have been many innovations in English teaching methods mainly made with respect to the teaching of four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing; grammar teaching has not yet received the attention it deserves. When learners master the knowledge of English grammar, they will be more confident in communication, which helps to improve their English competency. In addition, mastering grammar knowledge will also help students better improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Therefore, teaching grammar is very necessary and must always be focused in English classes in Vietnam. However, teaching and learning grammar has long been considered "uninteresting". Many studies have shown that the success or failure in learning and using grammar of learners is mainly determined by the teaching methods and tricks of the teacher. The tricks of teaching grammar that are engaging, interesting, motivating, and student-centered will bring practical effects. This paper presents the effectiveness of using games in teaching English grammar to major students at Dong Nai Technology University, Vietnam based on experimental results with a group of students majoring in English linguistics. Research results are the basis to confirm the effectiveness of using games in teaching English grammar.

**Keywords:** English grammar, grammar games, teaching and learning grammar, physical games, communicative games.

## 1. Introduction

Grammar is always one of the required modules in the training program for English majors. Grammar, which is defined as "the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence" according to [1] is an integral part of a language. That is the reason why teachers and students always focus on teaching and learning grammar. Therefore, how to effectively teach and learn grammar has always been an important task for both teachers and language researchers. In addition, Joseph Webbe, a teacher and expert in grammar, once wrote: "No man can run speedily to the mark of language that is shackled... with grammar precepts." [2]. He argued that grammar could be acquired simply by communicating and practicing through the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

However, grammar teaching and learning has long been considered with words like "difficult" and "boring" [3], and even "uninteresting and frustrating" [4], which partly due to teaching techniques involving memorization and working on written exercises [5].

Although the teaching and learning English in Vietnam has undergone amazing changes in the past few decades, the majority of teachers still prefer using Grammar Translation Method to guide students. With this method, teachers often present grammatical structures in Vietnamese, then practice in the form of written exercises. Although traditional grammar teaching methods help students learn grammar rules in an easier way, students often find it hard to engage in the lessons. In other words, traditional teaching methods still have some disadvantages that prevent learners from developing desire for learning English, especially English grammar. Firstly, the traditional grammar teaching method is teacher-centered. Therefore, most of the class time is spent explaining the English grammar rules in detail, while all students listen or take notes. A typical exercise of this method is to translate sentences from English to Vietnamese or vice versa, fill in the blanks with a suitable word and correct errors in the sentences. Therefore, lecturers and students hardly pay attention to developing English communication ability. Students acquire English passively and have very few opportunities to use English to communicate. Secondly, what Grammar Translation Method offers is the basic learning technique - memorization, which neither interest students, nor helps them build confidence in English communication skills, and even makes students afraid to learn grammar.

One method that can better the traditional grammar teaching method is to integrate games, especially communicative games into lessons. This method requires that teaching grammar must be based on real-life situations. The process of teaching and learning grammar is done by "learning by doing", in which students are required to participate in group activities or cooperate to complete games that require communication between students, so that students can absorb and memorize grammar rules in a natural and fun way.

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## 2. Roles of Games in Teaching and Learning English Grammars

Language games are games with rules whose main purpose is to develop language competence for learners. Language games are meaningful and are designed to create interactive activities. Games are used quite commonly in English classes and have been proven to be effective, especially with young learners. With adult learners, teachers can also flexibly apply games to improve teaching effectiveness. Teaching grammar through games has many benefits. Firstly, the game allows learners to learn, practice and grasp grammar and sentence structure in a wide range. This is done through the learner being repeatedly exposed to the target language grammar through the process of participating in the game. The second benefit is that the game creates learning excitement for learners. Whether the target audience is children or adults, they all prefer to participate in games than do written exercises. Games are clearly the most enjoyable way to learn and practice grammar and also the most popular way to learn since games bring fun, excitement and interaction, learners can learn grammar very easily in a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere. Therefore, games not only help learners learn and master important grammar knowledge, but also create a positive attitude towards learning foreign languages.

### 3. Popular Grammar Games

There are different types of grammar games that can be applied to teach and develop grammar knowledge for learners. However, depending on the target audience, the learner's level and the teaching materials, the teacher can choose appropriate games. Most grammar games can be designed toward physical games. In addition, [6] also introduces a number of ways to apply communication-oriented teaching methods to grammar classes such as: using games, solving puzzles, role-playing, storytelling, discussion, presentation. An important factor in the communicative classroom is the changing roles of teacher and student compared to a traditional language class. For the communicative teaching method, the teacher is no longer in control of the classroom activities. Instead, students actively work in groups or pairs and have to interact and communicate with each other to complete the task, while the lecturer stands outside and only gives instructions or solutions to problems.

Teachers are becoming more interested in integrating physical games into their grammar lessons, which can be seen from numerous popular teaching websites such as [teachthis.com](http://teachthis.com); [busyteachers.org](http://busyteachers.org) where teachers are reported to

make use of the material. According to [7], in their paper, they laid out several principles that relate physical games with second language acquisition. The first principle includes the idea that learners are frequently exposed to a certain grammar point to acquire particular language items. Secondly, learners need to be engaged in the lessons whose games are designed in a highly motivating way. The third principle is that the learners need to feel positive about the target language, the environment, the teachers, and their peers. The fourth principle encourages learners to use mental processing. The fifth principle is that language learners can benefit from noticing how a particular language point is used. The last principle is that teachers enable learners to use language to try to achieve communicative outcomes.

Popular games are classified into specific categories as follows:

1. *Matching*: Matching synonyms/antonyms, matching two sentences together, matching pictures with words etc.
2. *Ordering*: Arrange words to form sentences, arrange pictures in the order of the story, and arrange suitable words to form the longest meaningful sentence possible etc.
3. *Completing*: Add words to the blanks to complete the sentences.
4. *Competitions*: Compete to see how many sentences each team/player can complete in a certain amount of time, compete to see which team/who can put words into sentences the fastest, etc.
5. *Card games*: Games like bingo, dominoes etc.
6. *Memory games*: Contest to see how many sentences the player can remember the most in a given period of time.

### 4. The Effectiveness of Using Games to Teach Grammars Through an Initial Experiment

The researcher experimented using games in teaching English grammar to language major students at Dong Nai Technology University. The experimental subjects were 30 first-year English language students. The experimental period was 10 weeks, and conducted in the first semester of the school year 2020 - 2021. Before and after conducting the experimental teaching, the researcher investigated and found answers to the following questions: 1. what are students' attitudes for learning English grammar like? 2. What are students' perspectives on the use of games in teaching and learning English grammar? During the 10-week experiment, the researcher used 8 different grammar games such as Board game, 20 questions, Role play,

Table 1  
Topics and Games

Weeks	Topics	Grammar points	Games
Week 1	Travel and transport	Present tenses	No games
Week 2	Hobbies and sports	Past tenses	Board games
Week 3	Science and technology	Future tenses	20 questions
Week 4	People and society	Conditional sentences	matching
Week 5	The law and crime	Comparatives and superlatives	competitions
Week 6	Health and fitness	Modal verbs	Hangman
Week 7	Food and drink	Passive voice	Card games
Week 8	Money and shopping	Reported speech	Role play
Week 9	Entertainment	Relative clauses	Memory games
Week 10	Review for the final test	All the grammar points	No games

hangman, matching, competitions, memory games, and card games, to teach grammar knowledge according to the course outline.

Not all of the lessons will be conducted with games, the researcher decided what topics, and grammar points, what day of week can be integrated. Students studied in 10 weeks, 1 day a week and 120 minutes for each day. Here is the timetable for the experiment lessons.

The results after experimenting and analyzing data show that students' attitudes about learning English grammar have changed positively after teachers used grammar games. After the experiment, the majority (70%) of students gave positive feedback and said that learning English grammar is interesting, while this figure before the experiment was only 30%. 80% of students surveyed said that learning English grammar through grammar games is not only easy but also fun and interesting. This shows that students have changed their opinion on the issue of learning English grammar from negative to positive. For the question about students' attitudes and interest in learning when applying grammar games in the classroom, 95% of students liked the games and were interested in learning English during the game. It shows, students support the use of games in the classroom. In addition, students' learning motivation is also enhanced. 90% of students said that games help them enjoy learning English grammar more, and learning English grammar becomes more fun and easier. 85% of students said they were more actively involved in classroom activities and more active in self-study.

### 5. Conclusion

From the research's results, it can be confirmed that the use of games in teaching English grammar is effective. Grammar games help change students' attitudes towards learning English in general, and learning English grammar in particular. In addition, the games also help create a happy learning atmosphere, increase learning motivation inside and outside the

classroom. The use of grammar games also makes learning grammar meaningful, instead of memorizing and doing tedious grammar exercises, mechanically, which benefits both teachers and learners. However, in order to do this, teachers need to invest time, effort and intelligence in preparing lessons. In addition, teachers also need to be creative. In return, teachers will receive positive feedback and learning attitudes from learners. Teachers can use grammar games in teaching or reviewing English grammar activities, which are both quick, interesting and effective. In this article, the researcher focuses on the effectiveness of using grammar games in changing attitudes, increasing participation and improving students' motivation to learn English, while the effectiveness of the game in improving students' learning outcomes, as demonstrated by their scores or the ability to use English when communicating and working, has not been surveyed yet. The researcher hopes to continue to learn about this issue in future studies.

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