Do Games Make A Difference In EFL Contexts?[1]

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Abstract: *Games are regarded as fundamental part of foreign language education and as a central tenet of good language teaching at all levels but particularly at the primary stage. However, it is possible to argue that games are not being used frequently and effectively in the Turkish government schools for the teaching of EFL. As a result Ministry of National Education's (MNE) objectives to be communicative and to teach grammar through games are not being fulfilled. When carefully planned, games offer the advantages of both Audio Lingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching. Therefore, using games more frequently in EFL contexts in Turkey will help us fulfill the neglected communicative objectives set by the MNE. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of using games in the teaching of grammar in secondary school EFL contexts in Turkey. An experimental research design was used as the chief research design. Two identical 6th grade classes (n=60) were chosen as experimental and control groups. The results demonstrated that the experimental group scored significantly higher compared to the control group. Thus, we may come to the conclusion that that using games have positive effects on teaching grammar to 6th grade secondary school students in EFL contexts in Turkey.*

Key Words: *EFL, games, grammar, secondary school*

Introduction

Ministry of National Education's (MNE) English Language Programme for Primary Education Grades 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 (2013) clearly states that games should be a fundamental part of foreign language education because games are motivating, contextualizing, and natural activities that make learning meaningful. Many scholars and EFL teachers also point out the importance and effectiveness of games in EFL contexts. However, it is possible to argue that games are not being used frequently and effectively in the Turkish government schools for the teaching of EFL. In fact, studies reveal that games are almost non-existent in EFL contexts in Turkey.

In a study conducted by Kırkgöz (2006), for example, out of the 50 primary EFL teachers surveyed about their classroom practice, only 5 of teachers stated that they used games in their classes. However, in a follow up observation of the 18 volunteer teachers, none had been

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observed using games in their EFL classes. It was concluded in this study that, despite the MNE's objectives to be communicative and to teach grammar through games, these teachers remained unable to translate these curriculum objectives into their instructional practices. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the communicative orientation of ELT as advocated by the Turkish MNE.

In a more recent study, conducted by Yolageldili and Arıkan (2011), 15 EFL teachers were surveyed about their opinions on the effectiveness of using games in grammar teaching. They concluded that Turkish EFL teachers accept the effectiveness of using games in grammar teaching but yet they do not use games as frequently as expected. In other studies (i.e. İzgören, 1999 and Topkaya and Küçük, 2010) conducted in EFL contexts in Turkey, it is also stated that more games should be incorporated in the teaching of EFL. These and similar research findings, thus strengthen the argument that games are not being used frequently and effectively in the Turkish government schools for the teaching of EFL.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of using games in the teaching of grammar in a secondary school EFL context in Turkey. To this aim, an experimental research design was adopted and two identical 6th classes (11-year-olds) were chosen as experimental and control group, and a post-test was administered at the end of the study to compare the success rates between the groups.

Literature Review

According to Sharpe (2001) the use of games, game activities and game contexts is a central tenet of good language teaching at all levels but particularly at the primary stage, where once again we are dealing with engaging situations which make "human sense" to primary pupils. All sorts of games, invented as well as traditional and established games, can be used in all sorts of ways for all sorts of pedagogic purposes. They can be taught in the first instance as a whole class activity and then devolved down to group work and pair work; they can be used for teaching new material, for reinforcement or for revision. In a parallel vein Linse (2005) argues that play is a purposeful activity and games are a part of playing. As such, games are a very appropriate teaching technique. When carefully planned, games offer the advantages of both Audio Lingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching. You can very easily set up games so that children repeat the same patterns over and over again. Games can also be structured to maximize English language use. Therefore, using games more frequently in EFL contexts in Turkey will help us fulfill the neglected communicative objectives set by the MNE.

Rumley (1999) argues that games can be used to help reinforce learning of nouns and phrases and can be justified in a number of ways (Sharpe and Rumley, 1993). First, the format is known to the children and can be adapted for a variety of situations; second, there is a reason to be using the language in playing the game because it provides a context. Third, playing the game is

motivating; it is a real challenge and they want to win. Finally, a game provides an opportunity and a context for repetition which is otherwise tedious.

However, as argued by Cameron (2001), even though games provide rich learning opportunities for language learners only the more carefully planned and structured events using games will be classified as *"language learning tasks"*. This perspective turns the game into a tool for language learning and teaching, that can be effectively planned, implemented and evaluated. Therefore, a game should have a clear beginning and end; short or long to be counted as a classroom task. For the child, a classroom task should have a clear purpose and meaning; for the teacher, the task should have clear language teaching goals. Classroom tasks for children learning a foreign should:

- have coherence and unity for learners (from topic, activity and/or outcome),
- have meaning and purpose for learners,
- have clear language learning goals,
- have a beginning and an end,
- involve the learners actively.

In a parallel vein, Demirel (2004) cautions us that teachers should make a careful preparation in order to successfully benefit from games in the class. Games should be easy, simple and interesting enough so that the students will easily understand and participate in the game activity. Therefore, the games that are chosen should be flexible enough to suit the different levels and abilities of the students. The most important point not be forgotten is that appropriate games should be chosen and that every game should have a specific aim. Otherwise it is only a waste of time at the expense of the limited academic time. Ersöz (2007) clarifies the situation further in arguing that teachers need to make sure that whatever done in the classroom is for teaching and learning purposes. The key to a successful language game is that the rules are clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun. Many activities can be made into games by adding them some competition and fun. The teacher should follow certain steps:

- Give short but clear instructions,
- Demonstrate if necessary,
- Use instruction checking questions,
- Go straight to any group/ student that looks confused or is usually slow to catch on and get them started,
- Go around the class to make sure that everyone is doing the activity more or less correctly. If not, stop the whole class and explain again,
- Make sure to involve all the students at all times,
- Keep reminding the students that all activities have a teaching aim.

Taking into consideration the argument so far and under the light of the related literature it is possible to argue that there are many reasons why games can be an efficient means of teaching foreign languages. On this matter, Kirsch (2008, p.91) provides the following comprehensive summary by arguing that games:

- are enjoyable and appeal to pupils' sense of fun,
- have a motivating nature and as a result pupils want to play them several times,
- engage the whole learner by calling on their likes, fears and cognitive powers,
- create meaningful scenes of interaction in which players develop real strategies to win,
- promote participation, foster pupils' social skills and develop their ability to work together,
- have a repetitive character and require pupils to use the same limited amount of vocabulary and sentence structures over and over again, thus making pupils practice in a focused and rigorous way without even noticing,
- such as bingo and dominoes have the advantage that they can easily be adapted to language learning and so pupils know the game and that no time is lost with unnecessary explanations,
- encourage independent work.

Method

Research Design

The study was designed as an experimental research undertaken in a secondary school with sixth grade students during their English lessons with an aim to investigate the effects of using games over student achievement in grammar. "Conditional Sentences Type 1: probable" was chosen as the specific grammar topic, which was the 15th unit of the course book that was being used with the sixth grades in this study. For this purpose two identical classes were chosen as experimental and control group. The experimental group was taught by using games, and the control group was taught in a conventional manner. The experiment was undertaken during the first term of the 2013/14 academic year and lasted a total of eight lessons, two weeks (the mandated time by the Turkish NME's English language curriculum for the teaching of a unit).

Research Sample

A total of 60 sixth grade students (Class 6A and 6B) participated in the study who were selected by means of purposive sampling. The participants were divided into two groups as experimental and control. The two groups were identical in number and in relation to their level of English proficiency. There were six, sixth classes in the research site and their English Language teacher decided that Class 6A and 6B were the most identical classes taking into consideration their

English lesson grade averages for the previous year and female and male numbers. Table 1 compares the experimental and the control groups.

Table 1: Comparison of the Experimental and the Control Group

	Experimental Group N= 30	Control Group N= 30
Female	20	19
Male	10	11
English lesson average grade	4 (70-84)	4 (70-84)

Research Instruments and procedures

In order to investigate the effects of using games in teaching English grammar to secondary school students, two games were chosen to be used with the experimental group for the duration of the experiment (two weeks). The control group was taught in a conventional manner and they did not play any games. At the end of the experiment both groups were given a post-test (see Appendix) to explore the results. The games that were chosen were: "Roll and construct a sentence" and "Human sentence" (Cave, 2006). In total 20 different sentences were used during the games. Two examples are:

1. If/ you/ freeze/ water/ it/ turns/ into/ ice
2. If/ you/ heat/ liquid/ it/ turns/ into/ gas

For the "Roll and construct a sentence" game, sentences were written on cards and then cut up into pieces with individual words on them, and every piece was numbered randomly. The cards were shuffled, the students were divided into small groups and each group was given a die. They were told to roll the die and construct sentences. A total of ten sentences were used during this game. The first group to announce the sentence correctly was given a point.

For the "Human sentence" game, the students were divided into small groups and cards with individual words on them were delivered to group members randomly. Then the groups were asked to line up so that they would form a correct sentence within 45-60 seconds. A total of ten sentences were used during this game, as well. At the end of the time limit, the groups announced their sentences in the order they were standing. The correct "line-up" (sentence) was given a point.

Data Analysis

A post-test was administered to both groups at the end of the study to explore the effects of using games in teaching English grammar in general and about the teaching of "Conditional Sentences Type 1: probable" in specific. The post-test consisted of 3 sections and 10 questions: in section A

there were 3 "put the words in the correct order" questions, in section B there were 4 "multiple choice" questions, and in section C there were 3 "complete the sentences with the appropriate form of the verb" questions were asked. The post-test scores were later analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited with the research site, a Turkish state secondary school, and with the participants, 60, 6th class students at this school. Therefore, the findings are definitely not generalizable to all over Turkey. However, considering that education is nationally managed with the same standards by the National Ministry of Education in Turkey, similar findings are to be expected in other secondary school EFL contexts in Turkey. In order to achieve more generalizable findings the experiment must be duplicated in different schools with larger populations.

Results and discussion

Table 2: Post-test Results

Questions	Experimental Group (N=30)		Control Group (N=30)	
	Correct Answers	False Answers	Correct Answers	False Answers
1	26	4	18	12
2	26	4	17	13
3	15	15	6	24
Section A Totals	**67**	**23**	**41**	**49**
4	26	4	24	6
5	26	4	25	5
6	30	-	30	-
7	26	4	23	7
Section B Totals	**108**	**12**	**102**	**18**
8	25	5	17	13
9	22	8	8	22
10	23	7	10	20
Section C Totals	**70**	**20**	**35**	**55**
General Total Results	**245**	**55**	**178**	**122**
Success Rates	**%81,6**		**%59,3**	

As presented in Table 2 above, the experimental group scored significantly higher compared to the control group when evaluated overall. In the experimental group there were a total of 245 correct responses and 55 false responses. Thus the average post-test results of the experimental group were calculated as %81,6. In the control group on the other hand, there were a total of 178 correct responses and 122 false responses. Thus the average post-test results of the control group were calculated as %59,3. The number of correct responses given by the students in the experimental group was 67 more compared to the control group. In other words, the number of false responses given by the students in the control group was 67 more compared to the control group. These results make a total difference of %22,3 success rate on behalf of the experimental group. Depending on this result, it is possible to argue that teaching grammar to 6th grade students by making use of games can help students learn better and more effectively.

Results presented in Table 2, can further be evaluated section by section. In Section A, there were a total of 67 correct and 23 false responses given by the students in the experimental group, whereas there were a total of 41 correct and 49 false responses given by the students in the control group. In Section A, the students in the experimental group gave 26 more correct responses than the control group. To explain the situation better, this result means that, the success rate of the experimental group is %74,5 and the success rate of the control group is %45,5, thus making a total difference of %26. This difference in Section A is higher than the overall total difference (%22,3).

In Section B, there were a total of 108 correct and 12 false responses given by the students in the experimental group, whereas there were a total of 102 correct and 18 false responses given by the students in the control group. In Section B, the students in the experimental group gave 6 more correct responses than the control group. To explain the situation better, this result means that, the success rate of the experimental group is %90 and the success rate of the control group is %85, thus making a total difference of only %5. This difference in Section B is the lowest among the three sections and too much lower than the overall total difference (%22,3). I believe that this is mainly due to two basic reasons; question type and visuals. The first, question type, is that this section was organized as multiple choice type questions. The second, visuals, is that visuals were given next to the questions in this section. It is not possible to exactly determine whether it is the question type or the visuals that affected the low difference rate in Section B, but I think that visuals had a positive effect. This situation should be explored and clarified by further research.

In Section C, there were a total of 70 correct and 20 false responses given by the students in the experimental group, whereas there were a total of 35 correct and 55 false responses given by the students in the control group. In Section C, the students in the experimental group gave 35 more correct responses than the control group. To explain the situation better, this result means that, the success rate of the experimental group is %77,7 and the success rate of the control group is

%38,8, thus making a total difference of %38,9. This difference in Section C is the highest among the three sections and too much higher than the overall total difference (%22,3).

Overall, the experimental group scored the highest in Section B (%90), than in Section C (%77,7) and the lowest in Section A (%74,5). The control group, on the other hand, scored the highest in Section B (%85), than in Section A (%45,5) and the lowest in Section C (%38,8). The experimental group scored higher than %70 in all the sections, however the control group scored higher than %70 only in Section B and scored below %50 in the other two sections. In addition, I would like to emphasize one further point not mentioned in Table 2; the lowest student-score in the experimental group was 50, and only 2 students achieved 50. However, in the control group the lowest scores were 10 (2 students), 30 (2 students), 40 (5 students) and 50 (1 student).

Conclusion and recommendations

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the effects of using games in the teaching of grammar in secondary school EFL contexts in Turkey. An experimental research design was adopted for this purpose and a post-test was administered at the end of the study to compare the success rates between the groups. The findings demonstrated that the experimental group scored significantly higher compared to the control group. The average post-test results of the experimental group were calculated as 81, 6 and the average post-test results of the control group were calculated as 59, 3. Thus, the experimental group scored 22, 3 higher than the control group. This finding thus shows that games can have positive effects in the teaching of grammar to 6th grade secondary school students.

This finding strengthens and parallels the importance of games as mentioned in the related literature. Cervantes (2009), for example, claims that games are effective teaching tools and have many positive effects, including the creation of opportunities for students to communicate in a relaxed, friendly, and cooperative environment. In a similar vein, Alemi (2010) for example, who conducted a study about games and vocabulary learning, also concluded that using word games promotes vocabulary learning.

The evaluation of student responses to Section B in the post-test revealed an interesting finding. There was only a minor difference between the success rates of the experimental and the control group in Section B. Even though, it is not possible to explain the exact reason for this situation, we may speculate that question type, using visuals or both may have positive effects on teaching grammar. Therefore, further research needs to be carried out about the effects of question types, visuals and/or both on the teaching of grammar.

Finally, it is possible to suggest that this research finding can offer pedagogical applications for teachers, curriculum planners and textbook developers, and that games should be used more frequently in EFL contexts as it is also suggested by the MNE.

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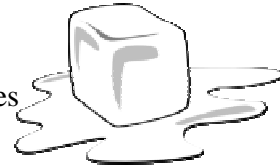
APPENDIX

A. Put The Words Into Correct Order

1. you/get/if/you/mix/red/white/and/pink ……………………………………………
2. it/heat/water/if/evaporates/you ……………………………………………………
3. it/heat/water/if/evaporates/you ……………………………………………………

B. Choose the Correct Answer

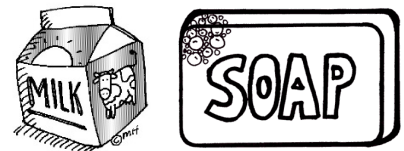1. If we cool water, it ……….into ice.
    a) evaporates   b) melts   c) sinks   d) freezes

2. If we leave ice-cream outside the fridge, it ……......
    a) melts   b) freezes   c) sinks   d) floats

3. Milk is ………. but soap is …………..
    a) gas/solid   b) solid/solid   c) liquid/solid   d) liquid/gas

4. If you heat a liquid, it ……….into gas.
    a) melts   b) freezes   c) cools   d) turns

C. Complete The Sentences With The Words In Parenthesis

1. If we………………(put) a cork in water, it ……………(float).
2. A balloon ………………(go) up in the air, if you ……………(fill) it with gas.
3. Butter………………(melt), if you ……………(put) it in a hot pan.