

Teaching and Learning Grammar by Games In EFL Classrooms in Moroccan High Schools

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Abstract: This research paper is an attempt to paint a picture of Moroccan English language teachers' attitudes towards the use of language games particularly grammar games in the classroom, and examine the effectiveness of the use of grammar games in teaching grammar lessons. To collect the data, a questionnaire was delivered to 30 Moroccan English high school teachers and to examine the effectiveness of using games, 50 high school first grade students were divided in two groups; first group learnt the grammatical item using games and the second learnt the same item without the games; after the experiment, all students sit for a grammar test. The findings of this study show that the participated Moroccan EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of grammar games in the classroom and illustrate that games are useful and effective in the process of learning grammar. Language games provide good ground for students to practice the target language and can be a good means to enhance EFL learning. Therefore, language games should be widely practiced in English teaching and learning in schools.

Key words: first language acquisition, English as a foreign or second language, English language learning and teaching, Language learning, Grammar games

Introduction

During the second half of the twentieth century, foreign language teaching as a field of research arrived on the scene. By the development of the field of linguistics, applied linguistics and other disciplines like psychology and sociology, many methods and approaches have emerged to understand how we, as human beings, acquire languages and to facilitate the learning / teaching of second or foreign languages.

Undoubtedly, Teaching is a very hard task; it requires great efforts from both teachers and learners. In this sense, teachers think about teaching as a very serious task and, thus, adopt different methods and approaches that could make the teaching and learning processes easier and more effective. However, in a foreign language context, which is the case of English in Morocco, students still feel bored and uninterested towards the way lessons, especially grammar, are presented in the classroom. Therefore, many Moroccan EFL teachers claim, on one hand, that their students face many problems such as lack of motivation, have inadequate speaking practice and lack of confidence to speak the language comfortably in the classroom. Moreover, Moroccan students still have grammatical problems which make them unable to communicate effectively in English language; although they learn English for their third year in junior school.

Accordingly, the present research is an attempt to show the attitudes of EFL Moroccan teachers towards the use of games in English lessons in general and grammar in particular, to examine the effectiveness of games in teaching grammar, and to imply that Moroccan EFL teachers are in dire need of implementing games activities in the learning process so as to help students find EFL classes more interesting and meaningful. This study aims to seek answers to the following questions: 1- What are the attitudes of Moroccan high school teachers towards using games in the classroom? 2- How frequent are grammar games used in EFL Moroccan high schools? 3- To what extent the use of games can reinforce the learning of grammar? 4- Do grammar games help students learn grammar effectively? 5- Do grammar games motivate students in the classroom? 6- Can grammar games motivate teachers in the classroom? 7- Are grammar games useful to encourage students to participate in the classroom?

Review of Literature

In the second half of the late twentieth century, games entered smoothly the field of education and considered as one of the useful techniques that teachers can use in their teaching process. Hadfield (1999) emphasizes the effective use of games and insists on integrating games in the language syllabus and not using it as “an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term” (p.8). Games are a combination of many elements such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning (Hadfield, 1999; Lee, 1991; and Greenall, 1990). Though language teaching and learning are hard tasks, teachers use games to create contexts in which the language becomes useful and meaningful, and the interest of learning is increased (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby 1984). Yet, there has been a common misconception that games are used only for fun, not for educational purposes. In accordance to Richard-Amato (1996) and Kim (1995) games are, although, associated with fun, they are effective in learning process as they increase learners’ motivation, lower their stress, and create the context in which the learners can experience the target language.

Based on the literature, the scholars who are interested in the use of games in education want to emphasize the ultimate goal that is to create an environment in which learners benefit much. They have argued that games have a positive impact on learners. Several researchers believe that games are highly motivating and encourage shy students to express themselves freely (Avedon & Sutton-Smith (1971); Boocock & Schild (1968); Bredemeier & Greenblat (1981); Clegg (1991); Coleman; Livingston, Fennessey, Edwards & Kidder (1973); Dorn (1989); Hansen (1994); Randel, Morris, Wetzel, & Whitehill (1992); Seidner (1978); Thiagarajan (1998); Wentworth & Lewis (1973); and Wright et al. (1984, 2006)). Wright et.al state that:

“Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information.” (2006, p.2)

It is clearly stated that games can motivate, increase learners interest, and catch their attention to participate in the learning process effectively. Additionally, researchers like Duong (2008), Nguyen & Khuat (2003) highlight that using games enable learners to remember what they have learnt faster and better because they feel relaxed while playing games. Moreover, games not only work for individuals but also for pair or group. According to Jacobs & Liu (1996), games

provide a ground for learners to interact and develop their communicative competencies. Furthermore, Zdybiewska (1994) assert that games increase learners' achievement as they provide an atmosphere to experience the language skills that is listening, speaking, reading and writing. Additionally, Riedle (2008) insists that learners will express their opinions and feelings and will achieve better scores when they play games.

In the context of using games in teaching grammar, there have been several remarkable studies done by Hamzah & Dourado (2010); Hartani (2012); Luong (2009); Nguyen (2005); and Yolageldili & Arikan (2011). Nguyen (2005) investigated 100 students and 10 teachers from Nong Lam University in Vietnam. He concluded that games are "vital part" because they provide practices and fun classroom activities. In the same perspective, Hamza and Dourado (2010) conducted a research on the effect of games in teaching simple present and simple past tense to 56 students in Malaysia. The participants were split into two groups; an experimental group in which students learn grammar with games and a control group in which students learn grammar without using games. The result indicated that the experimental group were more excited and motivated in learning grammar and teachers positively supported the use of games in teaching grammar. Conversely, Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) conducted a research on grammar teachers' perspectives on using games in teaching grammar. The results showed that teachers believe that games are effective in teaching grammar, but they had not used games frequently in the teaching process.

For further support of the effective use of games, Luong (2009) conducted a study in the use of games in teaching grammar to sixth grade students. The study was based on surveying 8 teachers and 225 students from three schools, and experimental project that involved 82 students. The finding significantly showed improvement of students' grammatical abilities in oral and written tests. Also, Hartani (2012) examined the effectiveness of mime game in teaching present continuous tense. 30 students in fifth grade participated in the study, they were divided in two groups; first group learnt the grammatical item using mime game and the second learnt the same item without the mime game. Hartani found that mime game was effective in teaching grammar and the students were enthusiastic and understand the present continuous better.

In brief, games prove to be a useful tool employed regularly in language teaching. Games not only offer learners a highly motivating, relaxing class, but most importantly meaningful practice to all language skills.

Methodology

The target of this research is Moroccan EFL teachers and learners. Thirty high school teachers of English as a foreign language in addition to 50 first grade high school students participated in this research. The learners aged 15~17 years, they study in one of the private schools in Casablanca. All learners in the school have to go through a level test and based on this test they are grouped in classes. the fifty students who participated in the current study were divided into two groups; 25 students were considered as experimental group and the other 25 as the control group. The students were taught by the same teacher, she taught the experimental group grammar using grammar games while the control group was taught without games. Finally, all the students had to sit for a test after they finish learning a grammar item.

In the current research study, the instrument for collecting data is consisted of questionnaire delivered to Moroccan EFL high school teachers for the purpose of obtaining teachers` attitudes towards using games particularly in grammar lessons. In addition, to measure the effectiveness of using games in teaching grammar, a post- test in grammar is used as another instrument in this research. Furthermore, the researcher noted down observations of the students` reactions during the grammar games.

In the present research, the questionnaire is addressed to high school English teachers to collect data about their frequency and beliefs about using grammar games in the classroom. The questionnaire is written in English language and it consists of sixteen questions (appendix A). The first five questions investigate teachers` opinion about English textbooks used in the Moroccan high school and its impact on students in terms of participation, motivation and willingness to attend the English class. The second set of questions (6- 16) aim to extract information about: teachers` opinion towards the use of games, their frequency of using language games, which language skills and language components they use games, and teachers` reasons behind using or not using games.

The process of measuring the effectiveness of learning grammar through games in the classroom involves conducting different kinds of games in grammar lessons for a period of one month, so that we can see how students reacted to this method of teaching grammar, and an achievement test in a form of a grammar test. The test includes the grammar elements that are taught during that month; reflexive pronouns, gerund, present perfect and past simple/ continuous. These elements are not chosen by the researcher, but they are part of the program at the time of investigation.

Let us now describe the games that we use in teaching reflexive pronouns, gerund, present perfect and past simple/ continuous. These games are from Rinvoluceri` (1984) s book “Grammar Games: Cognitive, Affective and Drama Activities for EFL students”.

1-Noughts and crosses: this game is used in teaching reflexive pronouns. We divide the class into two teams `A` and `B`, then we draw a grid on the board (see example.1). We tell the team A that they have 20 seconds to choose a particular square from the grid and produce a correct sentence using the word on the square. If they take longer than 20 seconds they lose their turn. If they produce a sentence, the team B is asked to judge whether it is correct or not. If the team A`s sentence is correct, we give them a cross in the corresponding square. Then the team B plays in the same way.

Table 1.

Example1

Myself	Ourselves	itself
yourself	Yourselves	herself
themselves	himself	

2- Double or quits: this game is used in teaching gerund. The participants are divided into teams to compete in an oral grammar quiz. The teacher read a sentence from a quiz sheet (see example.2) and asks a selected team to decide if the sentence is correct or incorrect. when the team`s answer is right, they have got two coins. When they think the sentence is incorrect and they successfully correct it, they have got five coins. Then, they are offered the chance of double or quits in the shape of another sentence. When they choose to double, they risk losing the money already won (if a team has successfully got through their second question, they do not offer double or quits again). When they choose to quit, the second sentence is offered to another team.

Table 2.

Example2: quiz sheet on verb usage.

I don't like to play cards.
They are afraid of swimming in the sea.
Samira is interested in make friends.
My grandmother is afraid of going by plane.
You should give up to smoke.
My little sister insists on doing homework herself.

3- Grammar tennis: We implement this game to teach present perfect and simple past. It is played in pairs as the teacher brings two students out to the front of the class. The student A `serves` by saying; the past participle of an irregular verb he or she knows, e.g. hidden. If A gets the past participle wrong, e.g. hided, the teacher gives him or her a second chance (like the second service in tennis). If A still gets the past participle wrong then B gets a point and the teacher write the correct form on the board. Then, the student B has to respond to the `service` and give the simple past form of the same verb. B only gets one chance, if he gives a wrong form the teacher corrects it and A gives the infinitive. If B is right then A has to give the infinitive of the same verb. Then, the student B serves by choosing a new irregular verb he or she knows. The first person to get five points is the winner. The process of the game can be repeated with a new pair.

4- Your words – my grammar: we apply this game in teaching present perfect, past simple and continuous. After the teacher writes a sentence on the board, e.g: They have got married, the students are asked to write sentences that have exactly the same grammar as the teacher`s sentence, but all the words apart from the one in bold, have, must be changed. Then, after getting the students` own sentences, the teacher asks the class to decide which sentences are right and which wrong.

Findings

The finding of the current research is based on the data collected through the questionnaire and the grammar test. The results are transmitted to figures and percentages under the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The questionnaire’s findings:

Table 3
the findings of teachers' questionnaire.

Question	Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moroccan EFL high school textbooks (Visa to English, Gateway to English, Insight into English) feed learners' different styles. 	Agree (30% n= 9), Neutral (33,3% n=10) Disagree (36,6% n=11) Motivating (26,6% n=8), Neutral (43,3% n=13)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent can these textbooks and their activities motivate your students? 	Demotivating (30% n=9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are your attitudes towards your students in the EFL classroom in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students` ability to speak English language comfortably Student`s motivation. 	Good (16,7% n=5), Average (56,7% n=17), Weak (26,6% n=8) Motivating (46,7% n=14), Neutral (20% n=6), Demotivating (33,3% n=10) High (33,3% n=13), Neutral (46,7% n=14), Low (10% n=3)
-Readiness to attend the class.	Often (33,3% n=10), Sometimes (53,3% n=16), Rarely (10% n=3),
4.Do you find any difficulties to encourage shy students to participate and take risks in the classroom?	Never (3,3% n=1) Often (23,3% n=7), Sometimes (70% n=21), Never (6,7% n=2)
5.Students get bored with the traditional teaching styles in grammar	Often (20% n=6), Sometimes (43,3% n=13), Rarely (33,3% n=10),
6.Frequency of using games	Never (3,3% n=1) No (96,7% n=29) yes (3,3% n=1)
7.games are: time fillers	No (93,3% n=28) yes (6,7% n=2)
Waste of time	No (80% n=24) yes (20% n=6)
Ice breakers	No (33,3% n=10) yes (66,7% n=20)
Means for education	No (30% n=9) yes (70% n= 21)
Motivational tools	No (53,3% n=16) yes (46,7% n=14)
Means for entertainment	
8.I use of games in teaching:	No (60% n= 18) yes (40% n=12)
reading	No (70% n=21) yes (30% n=9)
writing	No (73,3% n=22) yes (26,7% n=8)
listening	No (16,7% n=5) yes (83,3% n=25)
speaking	No (53,3% n=16) yes (46,7% n=14)
grammar	No (16,7% n=5) yes (83,3% n=25)
vocabulary	
9.You use games because they:	No (30% n=9) yes (70% n=21)
Are fun and learners like them	No (40% n=12) yes (60% n=18)
make students participate, especially shy students	No (60% n=18) yes (40% n=12)
add variation to the lesson	No (86,7% n=26) yes (13,3% n=4)
make learning become acquisition	No (53,3% n=16) yes (46,7% n=14)
increase student`s motivation	No (36,7% n=11) yes (63,3% n=19)
make learning enjoyable and effortless	No (80% n=24) yes (20% n=6)
make learning meaningful	

10. you do not use games because they:	No (43,3% n=13)	yes (56,7% n=17)
cause too much noise	No (76,7% n=23)	yes (23,3% n=7)
are time consuming	No (86,7% n=26)	yes (13,3% n=4)
bring about misbehaviours	No (96,7% n=29)	yes (3,3% n=1)
are money consuming	No (96,7% n=29)	yes (3,3% n=1)
bring about spoilt students	No (96,7% n=29)	yes (3,3% n=1)
are teachers' energy consuming	No (66,7% n=20)	yes (33,3% n=10)
make students uncontrollable	No (100% n=30)	yes (0% n=0)
are not appropriate for young adults	Agree (100% n=30)	disagree (0% n=0)
11. games can enhance teacher's motivation in the classroom	motivating (93,3% n=28) Neutral (6,7% n=2) demotivating (0% n=0)	
12. In your opinion, to what extent can games motivate your students in the classroom?	agree (63,4 n=19) Neutral (20% n=6) disagree (16,7% n=5)	
13. Language games, particularly grammar games, meet all learners' different learning styles?	effective (23,3% n=7), efficient (26,7% n=8), useful (46,7 n=14), quite useful (3,3% n=1)	
14. Do you see the use of grammar games in EFL classes as:	all the time (13,3% n=4), as supplementary activities (50% n=15), from time to time (36,7% n=11)	
15. Grammar games should be used:	be effective and make learning enjoyable (86,7% n=26), be approved by students (13,3% n=4)	
16. If grammar games are included in the syllabus, do you think that they will:		

EFL teachers were asked to respond to 16 questions which include Likert-type statements and yes/no questions to reveal their attitudes towards the use of games in teaching. As it is represented in Figure 3., the EFL Moroccan teachers believe that the English textbooks they use in the classroom are not highly motivating students and the grammar teaching method and activities do not encourage students to learn affectively. Also, the collected data revealed that Moroccan EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of games in teaching all language skills and language components like vocabulary and grammar, but the majority use games with speaking (83%) more than with listening (26%), writing (30%) and reading (40%). Games are not highly used in teaching grammar (46%) as they are used in teaching vocabulary (83%). Besides, all the participant EFL teachers claim that games enhance their motivation in the classroom and the overwhelming majority of them think that games can motivate students in the classroom (93.3%). Additionally, 50% of EFL teachers view that games should be used as supplementary activities in teaching grammar in EFL classroom and 86% see that including grammar games in the syllabus would be effective and make learning enjoyable.

Grammar test results:

Table 4. Group: A (studied grammar without using games)

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	8,00	1	4,0	4,0
	9,00	5	20,0	24,0
	10,00	7	28,0	52,0
	11,00	6	24,0	76,0

12,00	4	16,0	16,0	92,0
16,00	2	8,0	8,0	100,0
Total	25	100,0	100,0	

Table 5. Group:B (studied grammar using games)

		Freque ncy	Percen t	Valid Percen t	Cumulat ive Percent
Valid	11,00	3	12,0	12,0	12,0
	12,00	2	8,0	8,0	20,0
	13,00	7	28,0	28,0	48,0
	14,00	5	20,0	20,0	68,0
	15,00	4	16,0	16,0	84,0
	16,00	3	12,0	12,0	96,0
	17,00	1	4,0	4,0	100,0
	Total	25	100,0	100,0	

Table 6. General statistics of grammar test

		GroupA	GroupB
N	Valid	25	25
	Missing	0	0
Mean		10,7600	13,7200
Std. Error of Mean		,38419	,32924
Median		10,0000	14,0000
Mode		10,00	13,00
Std. Deviation		1,92094	1,64621
Variance		3,690	2,710
Minimum		8,00	11,00
Maximum		16,00	17,00

The statistics above shed lights on students` performance on the grammar test. The group A represents students who studied grammar without using games and the group B students who studied grammar via using games. Significantly the grammar test showed that students in group B have got very good marks since 4 of them have got 16/20 and above. In addition, their average mark is 13.72/20 while the minimum one is 11/20. One the other hand, students of the group A have got intermediate marks, except two students who have got 16/20. The average mark is 10.76/20 and the minimum one is 8/20. In this sense, implementing games activities in the learning process proves its usefulness and efficacy.

Group Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score studied grammar without using games	25	10.7600	1.92094	.38419
studied grammar using games	25	13.7200	1.64621	.32924

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Score									
Equal variances assumed	.003	.953	-5.850	48	.000	-2.96000	.50596	-3.97731	-1.94269
Equal variances not assumed			-5.850	46.900	.000	-2.96000	.50596	-3.97793	-1.94207

The controlled group ($N = 25$) learned English grammar without using games $M = 10.76$ ($SD = 1.92$). By comparison, the experimental group ($N = 25$) learned English grammar using games $M = 13.72$ ($SD = 1.64$). To test the effectiveness of using games in teaching grammar with statically significantly different mean, an independent sample t-test was performed. As can be seen in Table., the controlled group and experimental group distributions were sufficiently normal for the purpose of conducting a t-test... Additionally, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene's F test, $F(48) = .003$, $p = .953$. The independent samples t-test was associated with a statically significant effect, $t(48) = -5.850$, $p < .001$. We can be 95% confident that the true difference between these means is $CI = [-3.977, -1.942]$. Thus, the students who learned English grammar using games were statically significantly performed in the grammar test better than the students who learned grammar traditionally (without using games).

Conclusion and Implication

The present study aimed to investigate the attitudes of Moroccan English teachers towards the use of games in teaching grammar. A total of 30 teachers have participated in this study to find out whether there is any correlation between the use of games and grammar learning. In addition, 50 students in common core (1st year in high school) were chosen to participate in the study; half of them constituted the experimental group who benefit from the use of grammar games while the other half represented the control group who studied grammar without using grammar games.

Significantly, the findings of this study show that Moroccan EFL teachers have different views about the English textbooks used in high schools. Thus, this diversity may be influenced by several factors such as school environment, the method used by teachers as well as students' intrinsic motivations. However, most of the participants in this study agreed that the activities and the method used to teach grammar do not encourage students to learn effectively, it makes them get bored and affects their performance inside and outside the classrooms. Meanwhile, teachers claim that games are useful in teaching grammar as they are useful in teaching language skills and vocabulary. Thus, grammar games provide an authentic environment for students to learn and practice grammar spontaneously. Besides, based on my observation during the experiment in the classroom, grammar games make the learning enjoyable and motivate students for successful participation. This is also emphasized by the informants through their answers to the questions 9 and 16 (see appendix). They claim that grammar games are not used only to increase motivation or make learning meaningful but also to encourage all students, including the shy ones, to participate in the classroom. These findings support Hansen's (1994) and Riedel's (2008) claim that games motivate learners and give shy learners more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings. The findings also reveal the fact that the Moroccan EFL teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of games in teaching grammar and suggest that integrating games in the English syllabus, will make learning enjoyable, effective, and approved by students. These findings are in line with the claim of Chen (2005), Clegg (1991), Coleman et al. (1973), and Randel et al. (1992) among others who insists on the importance of integrating games in the syllabus. Moreover, most students enjoyed learning grammar using games. One of the students (personal communication) said: ``honestly, before, I hated the grammar lessons because they were boring and most of the students in the class showed no interest in the classroom. But, when I have experienced the use of games in the classroom I loved English grammar to the extent that I keep waiting the next session to come``. Another student said: ``my English class becomes more active and almost everybody participates... we enjoy the English course``. (translation from Moroccan Arabic into English, mine).

Games help students to perform well in the classroom, 100% of the students who learned grammar using games score above the average mark while 24% of the students who learned grammar without using games get below the average mark. The scores obtained in the grammar test significantly prove that games are useful and effective in the process of learning grammar the same idea was indicated by Hamzah and Dourado (2010). Hence, students during the grammar lesson participate and create their own sentences which make them able to remember

the forms and the uses of the grammar elements they have studied. Games in the classroom can motivate the EFL learners, promote their interactions and enhance their achievements.

The current study involves number of limitations that address generalizability of findings. The first limitation pertains to the representativeness of the sample. As only 30 teachers and 50 students who participated in this study, the size of the sample was not large enough or representative of different regions of Morocco to be able to generalize the findings, and the informants` responses are personal which may not reflect the attitudes of the whole population. The second limitation relates to the instruments used to collect the data, although the instruments in this study (teachers` questionnaire and grammar test) provide important and significant results, it would be more important if it is supported by other instruments like questionnaire for students, interviews and focus group. Hence, the findings demonstrated significant benefits from explicitly integrating grammar games into the curriculum, it remains uncertain whether the results would be generalized, replicable overtime or transfer to other sittings.

In short, the main concern of this piece of research is to show the effectiveness of using grammar games in Moroccan EFL classroom. Under this main objective, other objectives emerge namely: finding out teachers' opinions about using games, identifying Moroccan EFL teachers' reasons behind using or not using games and know the feasibility of game-based syllabi in the ELT task in Morocco. Based on these objectives, hypotheses and research questions were formulated. It was concluded through this study that Moroccan EFL teachers who participated in the present study have positive attitudes towards the implementation of games in teaching English grammar. Additionally, the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire shows that those teachers perceive games as useful and effective tools to motivate students, provide them with a stress-free atmosphere and hence maximize learning and retention of input. Moreover, the analysis of the second research instrument (grammar test) indicates that the experimental group who was taught grammar with the use of games significantly outperformed the control group. Furthermore, students really like being taught via games because these latter make them learn easily and meaningfully. Then, it is therefore strongly recommended here to use games in language classes in general and in EFL in particular. Thus, a successful English language teaching would be achieved when the teacher provides realistic opportunities for students to negotiate meaning and participate in collaborative and authentic conversations through a variety of learning activities such as language games.

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