

## The Effect of Fun Exercise on Grammar Learning

Fatemeh Sadat Alamdar<sup>1\*</sup>

---

1. Department of Sirik Education.

\* Corresponding Author's Email: f.alamdar67@gmail.com

---

**Abstract** – This study aimed to investigate the effects of funny exercise on the learning of English grammar for the first grade of students at Hazrate Maryam school. To achieve this aim, the researcher adopted an experimental approach. The sample of the study consisted of 80 female students from Hazrate Maryam school. The participants were divided into two equivalent groups: a control group of 40 students, and an experimental one of 40 students. The educational games strategy was used in teaching the experimental group, while the traditional method was used with the control one in the first term and the first month of the second term of the school year. An achievement test of five scopes with 50 items was designed and validated to be used as a pre and posttest, as well as five quizzes, for the purpose of formative evaluation. The achievement test was meant to prove groups equivalence. Besides, it was used as a posttest to measure any possible differences between the two groups. The collected data were analyzed and treated statistically through the use of SPSS. The findings indicated that there were statistical significant differences between both groups, favoring the experimental one, which is due to the method of educational games strategy. Furthermore, implementing the effect size equation, the study revealed that educational game strategy had a large effect size favoring the experimental group. In the light of those findings, the study recommended the necessity of implementing educational game strategy in teaching English language to make better outcomes in students' achievement of English language. Also, the researcher suggested that further research should be conducted on the effects of games on different English skills, and other school subjects as well.

**Keywords:** grammar, funny exercise, learning

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English language plays an important role in everyday situations all over the world. It is a universal language which deals with all aspects of life. It is the language of science, information, technology, politics, economics and education. (Hamdona, 2007:1)

In fact, grammatical knowledge is regarded as a very important element of communicative competence and for language users to communicate effectively. Hence, grammar is an essential tool in building confidence, language knowledge and fluency. (Vasilopoulos, 2008:3)

Teachers often ask about the most effective method to teach grammar. In the early days of grammar teaching, teachers used grammar translation method. In this method, students were asked to translate sentences into English based on grammar rules (Hussein, 2004:1). In fact, using rules in teaching grammar is considered as explicit knowledge.

Hamrick (2008:1) believed that some teachers still accept grammar-based method as the central method of language instruction, while others see it as a waste of time. In fact, some teachers use the explicit teaching grammar by using meta-language to explain the rules of the second language.

The main justification for such an enduring practice may be the fact that in a typical Iranian class there are about forty students. Language teachers feel they cannot afford to offer communication-based practice and so they concentrate on teaching grammatical rules. Although they try their best to explain the rules, these explanations are usually not made as part of a contextualized framework. Teachers use grammar exercises and practice drills which often have little or no meaning for their students.

With this approach there are usually few interactions between the teacher and the students, or between the students themselves. Most of the students feel anxious and uncomfortable. They prefer to keep silent because they are not used to speaking English in front of the whole class and are afraid of "losing face", due to their likely errors (Gary, Marrone & Boyles, 1998). It is hard to find out whether students have understood what teachers have taught them. As a result, our students feel that grammar is not meaningful and memorable, reflecting what researchers have found (Engel & Myles, 1996; Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Madylus, 2002).

Many teachers tried to adopt methods of communicative language teaching in their classrooms such as using games in teaching. Decsri (2002:1) stated that:

Some teachers think that language games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in classroom. Since games sometimes have been considered only for its one element that is fun. In fact, games can provide EFL and ESL students more than that. Among several strategies used to improve students' proficiency such as visual aids, CALL, drama, role-play and songs, games are another useful strategy to promote students' language proficiency.

Generally speaking, the advantages and the benefits of using games in language-learning can be summarized in nine points: Games

- are learner-centered
- promote communicative competence
- create a meaningful context for language use.
- increase learning motivation
- reduce learning anxiety
- integrate various linguistic skills.
- encourage creative and spontaneous use of language.
- construct a cooperative learning environment.
- foster participatory attitudes of the students. (Jung, 2005:1-2)

In short, "games make the learning process closer to the acquisition process, which makes students learn in a more natural way" (Misirli, 2007:3).

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### 2.1. English Book in Iran

In Iran, students have English course from the first grade of guidance school. In those books, writers have tried to help the students learn new words and new grammars which are more useful than the others like simple tense and past tense. After that, they have English course in high school for 4 years. They have just one book. In that book the writers talked about grammar, pronunciation, dictation, vocabularies, reading, writing, speaking and at last listening. This book is talked about many things but because it has not any funny exercises or funny pictures, students do not like to use this book or even to learn English. This book is too outdated. English book which is taught for first grade of high school students, has some exercises which do not have any learning purposes behind them. This book has nine lessons. I will explain them briefly:

1. In the first lesson, the writer talked about how to use had to, has to, and must. And how to write sentences with these verbs.
2. The second lesson is talked about how to use it in sentences.
3. The tired lesson is talked about how to use adjective for
4. The forth lesson is talked about
5. The fifth lesson is talked about how to write sentences.
6. The sixth lesson is talked about how to write tag questions.
7. The seventh lesson is talked about how to use that after some verbs like hope, think...
8. The eighth lesson is talked about passive sentences.
9. And at last the ninth lesson is talked about how to use present perfect tense.

### 2.2. General Goals for Teaching English in English for Iranian First Grade of High School Textbook

Teaching English in first grade of high school, aims to achieve the following:

1. It exposes students to learning experiences and opportunities that will enable them to comprehend, interpret, and appreciate written texts of different genres and on a variety of topics.
2. It refines students' use of reading micro skills.
3. It develops students' ability to comprehend information in extended and international and transactional discourse.
4. It develops students' awareness of stylistic techniques and variations in written and oral texts.
5. It develops students' ability to critically evaluate texts, ideas, and arguments.
6. It refines students' ability to use language appropriately.
7. It develops students' ability to read texts of different modes.
8. It develops students' test-taking skills.

Many people who are not native English speakers would like to learn this useful skill. Learning a foreign language, though, is difficult at any age. If the lessons are boring and monotonous, students will not be inclined to pay attention. All of us know that if something is fun for us, it will be easy to learn it. I am an English teacher and in these several years which I thought English as a foreign language, I faced with different problems. My students complained that their exercises which exist in their book were so boring and in some cases their exercises did not help them learn the grammar. Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) can be challenging for students. Adding games and other fun activities to our lesson plan not only captures the attention and imagination of students, but the interaction and hands-on experiences generally allow for better retention of new information, and encourage students to study more thoroughly so they can excel at the game or activity. Games are a way to review a lesson and push students to learn. One of the important grammar aspects students in English as a foreign language (EFL) class need to learn is the past perfect. Getting them to write down their experiments and diaries can be a good way of generating examples to explain this tense. Students generally find it easy to understand the formation of the past perfect tense. It is important that they learn not only the affirmative form, but also the negative and interrogative forms of usage. Grammar doesn't have to be something that students struggle to memorize from a textbook. In fact, that rarely even works. Students learn grammar much better when they have a chance to use it within different contexts.

### **3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the effects of game-based grammar practice on the accuracy level of selected grammatical features by beginner students of English as a foreign language, their perception of language games as a learning strategy, their attitude towards the role of grammar in language learning, and the impact of the use of games on their motivation to learn and on classroom atmosphere. This study focuses on the students' written production of L2 English. The research questions are as follows:

1. Do the experimental students taught by the game-based grammatical practice perform better in grammatical accuracy than those in the control group taught by the traditionally exercise-based practice?
2. Is the level of effectiveness of game-based grammatical practice comparable across the language competence levels?
3. Does game-based grammatical practice enhance the students' learning motivation?
4. Does game-based grammatical practice create a more positive classroom atmosphere during language lessons?

#### **3.1. Grammar**

Thornbury (2004:1) defined grammar as "the study of what forms or structures are possible in a language". While, Abu Jeld (2004:2) clarified grammar as:

The sounds and sound patterns, the basic units of meaning such as words and the rules to combine them to form new sentences constitute the grammar of a language. These rules are internalized and subconsciously learned by native speakers.

According to Swan (2009: xix) "grammar is the rules that show how words are combined, arranged or changed to show certain kinds of meaning". Radford (1997:1) believed that, traditionally, grammar is not only interested in forming the words, phrases and sentences together but also concerns with the interpretation.

The main goal of teaching grammar is to help students speak English with organized and correct structures. If students learn English with clear and right structures when they are young, they will be good communicators in the future. Without grammar, students are able to communicate effectively only in limited situations. Besides, grammar is regarded as very essential part of the study of language and ideas. In fact, grammar helps humans to analyze and describe their language. In addition, many EFL students seek to continue their study in foreign countries and they need to pass exams such as TOEFL and IELTS. So, students must be excellent at grammar to succeed in the exams (Abu Jeld, 2004:6).

### **3.2. Games**

Games are regarded as a very useful and important strategy to stimulate language acquisition. They are defined as a form of play concerning competition, rules and fun. So, teachers should use games in teaching to attract students' attention, decrease students' stress and give them the opportunity to communicate effectively (Deesri, 2002:1).

According to Jung (2005:4) "games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency and communicative skills". In fact, games give students enjoyment and useful practice. They should be used according to students' reactions and response. Thus, games should not be a meaningless habit. The element of surprise and variety should be excited. As a result, games are supposed to be attractive and interesting as well as those students feels happy when they participate in game-playing. In addition, games strengthen the relationship between the teacher and the students (Carrier, 1985:1).

Games are excellent strategy for teaching language. They are not only used for entertainment activities but also for practicing communication. Games regard as a tool for improving problem solving skills and stimulating the students' language competence. So, they are activities which need efforts to achieve certain aims according to certain specific goals (Harb, 2007:33).

Hadfield (2002:4) defined games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun". Deesri (2002:1) defined games as "a form of play governed by rules. They should be enjoyed and fun".

By using games, teacher should concentrate on communication rather than on correctness of language. Games should be an important part in the English curriculum, not as an amusing activity. They give students good chance for real communication and thus bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world. (Hadfield, 2002:4).

Yu (2005:46) clarified that "language games have effective ability to develop student's motivation". So, using games in teaching English will vary a lesson and motivate students. English becomes useful and less frightening. (McLaughlin, 2004: 95). Accordingly, the lack of motivation is probably the greatest obstacle to learn (Yu, 2005:46).

Jones (2005:1) stated that "competition can make even the dullest lesson exciting for both adults and children". Hong (2002:1) stated that "Teachers need to consider which games to use, when to use them, how to link them up with the syllabus".

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The setting for this study is Hazrate Maryam high school which I am teaching there. This school is in Sirik. It has a class with computers and projector which teachers can use them in order to teach their book. I taught the two classes, and I used mainly the traditional grammar approach. The students who participated in this experiment were in two of my English classes (80 students in all). All students have studied English as a foreign language for at least three. They are 15-16 year-old beginners. The reason for the selection of this sample was to examine foreign language acquisition in the early stages, as I was assuming that these students would be more receptive to changes in teaching methods than older students. Furthermore, beginners are often tricky to teach and tricky to interest in grammar and the level was a very challenging and important for language teaching.

**Table 1: Students Demographic Information**

Variables experimental group(N=40) control group(N=40)				
	No	Mean	No	Mean
Gender	40		40	
Female				
Existing English Grammar				
Yes	40		40	
No	0		0	
Exposure to games				
A lot	10		12	
Some	25		20	
None	5		8	
EFL scores		14.50		14.32
Average of last grade		15.87		15.64

**Table 2: Distribution of Students According to their EFL scores in the first term**

Language level sub groups	Distribution of Students	
	Experimental Group	Control Group
All language level	40	40
High language level	15	14
Middle language level	15	16
Low language level	10	10

The two groups were taught following the same teaching plan. Both groups received an equal amount of instruction time over 3 weeks, for a total of 6 periods (each of 90 minutes duration). Instruments used to measure students' learning outcomes; motivation, classroom atmosphere.

**Table 3: Data Collection**

Quantitative data
a. Student demographic information form
b. Questionnaire on motivation
c. Questionnaire on classroom atmosphere
d. Tests on grammar accuracy: 3 grammar tests

#### 4.1. Materials

I used the following materials for my research:

The Questionnaires on Motivation and on Classroom Atmosphere were prepared by Yu (2005), drawing upon some proven motivation/attitude scales and classroom atmosphere scales (Lee, 2001; Lin, 2002).

I used a questioner which Yu (2005) used it in his research. The Questionnaire on Classroom Atmosphere measured four aspects of class interaction: peer support, teacher support, level of satisfaction and class cohesion (see Table 3.4).

**Table 4: Classroom Atmosphere Scale: Items Employed to Assess Four Factors of Students' Perception on the Classroom Atmosphere**

Factors	Items	Total	Alpha
Peer support	1-11	11	0.8754
Satisfaction	12-20	9	0.7997
Teacher support	21-28	8	0.8857
Classroom cohesion	29-35	7	0.8051
Total questions	35	35	0.9387

Lightbown and Spada (1999) questioned the meaning of a significant difference between two groups if such difference is determined only by one written grammar test. Therefore, in the course of this experiment, I took the following formats:

1. Written tests (3 in all), designed to assess students' knowledge of selected grammatical features;

#### 4.2. Procedure

Data were collected over 3 weeks. The procedures of data collection are all recorded in the Table 5.

**Table 5: Overview of Data Collection**

Week 1: First pilot study:

Student Demographic Information;

Questionnaire on Motivation

Questionnaire on Classroom Atmosphere

Start of grammatical teaching using games with the Experimental Group ,and traditional grammatical practice with the Control Group;

Pre-test with both the Experimental and Control group;

Week 2: grammatical teaching using games with the Experimental Group ,and traditional grammatical practice with the Control Group

First grammar test conducted with both groups;

Second grammar test conducted with both groups;

Week 3: Post-test with both the Experimental and control Group

Questionnaire on Motivation;

Questionnaire on Classroom Atmosphere;

The end of the experiment

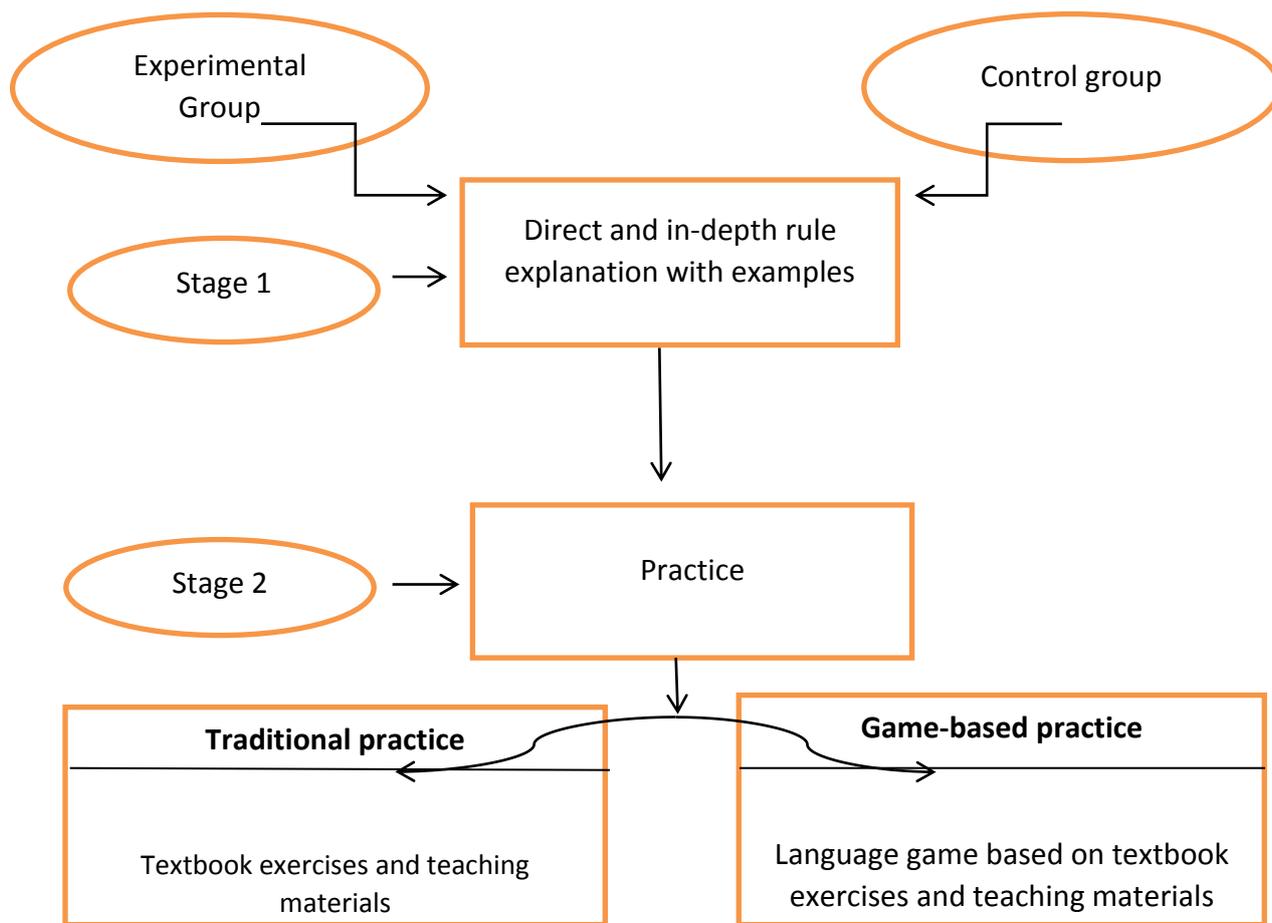


Figure 1: Teaching Program

Table 6: The Games Used in the Study

games	Grammar features	Sentence structure	Function	Language skills
Interview	Present perfect	What has he/she done? What have they done?	Use present perfect in their sentences	Listening , speaking,
Picture and board game	Present perfect	Yes/no questions structure	Use present perfect in their sentences	Listening, speaking, reading, writing
Who wrote what about me?	Present perfect	Yes/no questions structure	Use present perfect in their sentences	Listening, speaking, reading, writing
Matching Game	Present perfect	structure	Use present perfect in their sentences	Listening, speaking, reading, writing
Memory game	Present perfect	structure	Use present perfect in their sentences	Listening, speaking, reading, writing
Picture game	Present perfect	Yes/no questions structure	Use present perfect in their sentences	Listening, speaking, reading, writing
Grammar letters	Present perfect	structure	Use present perfect in their sentences	Listening, speaking, reading, writing

## 5. RESULTS

The results of the pre-test indicated that the two groups obtained comparable total scores: the mean total score of the experimental group was 16.39 and the mean total score of the control group was 16.48. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. In order to find out whether the game-based practice was making any significant difference during the 3-week treatment period, the results of a total of 3 grammar tests were collected from the two groups. There was a 1.32 mean difference between the high and the middle language level while a 0.22 mean difference was found between the middle and the low language levels. The ANOVA results show that there was no significant difference between the three levels. The middle and low level students in the experimental group grew at their own pace, made improvement, and performed as well as the high level students did. That means that the three levels were not homogeneous before the study, but became homogeneous after the study.

In contrast to the improvement of middle and low language levels in the experimental group, the students from the middle and low language levels of the control group performed similarly to their pre-tests. The mean difference between the high and middle language levels of the control group was 5.30, while the mean difference between the middle and low language levels was 3.20. The mean difference between the high and low language levels reached 8.64. The ANOVA result showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the three levels ( $F=3.487$ ,  $p=0.049$ ).

In addition to the intra-group analysis, also the comparisons of inter-group were made on the gain scores of each language level in both groups. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $t=1.879$ ,  $p=0.052$ ). However, the experimental groups had a higher mean post-test score than the control group (17.85 versus 16.02). This finding indicates that the experimental group outperformed the control group ( $MD=1.80$ ). In other words, the game-based practice gave the experimental group some advantage over the control group, although the difference was not statistically significant.

The results of the statistical analysis reported that the experimental students performed better overall over the control group. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Also, the results of the statistical analysis reported that the students in the high levels in both groups, performed better than the other two levels; the progress of the students from middle language level and low. Language level of the experimental group was obvious. However, the difference between the experimental levels and the control levels was not statistically significant.

The experimental group scored similarly in the post-test after the three-week intervention of the game-based practice, with the scores slightly higher than in the pre-test (764.5 versus 765.25,  $MD= -0.75$ ,  $p> 0.05$ ). However, a higher growth pattern was found between the post-test and the delayed post-test (765.25 versus 774,  $MD=-8.75$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), as well as between the pre-test and the delayed post-test (764.5 versus 774,  $MD=-9.50$ ,

$p < 0.001$ ). The experimental group gained statistically significant improvement in their motivation toward learning English after 3 weeks intervention of the game-based practice. The motivation change of the experimental group.

About motivation, the control group scored lower in the post-test than the pre-test after the 3-week intervention with the traditional practice (74.149 versus 75.745,  $MD = 1.596$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). It was noted that a higher growth pattern was found between the post-test and the delayed post-test (74.149 versus 76.766,  $MD = -2.617$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Nevertheless, in comparison to the pre-test, no significant difference was found between the pre-test and the delayed post-test, though the Students' motivation for learning English was higher in the delayed post-test ( $MD = 1.021$ ). The mean difference of 1.021 did not reach a statistically significant difference. The control group did not gain significant improvement in their motivation toward learning English after 3 weeks intervention with the traditional practice.

In contrast to the significant motivational improvement in the experimental group ( $p < 0.001$ ), there was no significant difference recorded in the control group in terms of Motivational change ( $p > 0.05$ ). The findings indicated that there were significant differences between the pre-test and the delayed post-test for the experimental students, after the intervention with the game-based practice for 3 weeks. However, the students in the control group did not have a significantly different motivational change after the intervention with the traditional grammar teaching practice.

About classroom atmosphere, the experimental group scored slightly higher in the post-test than in the pre-test (38.304 versus 37.413). The mean difference score of 0.891, however, indicates that there was no statistically significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ). But when the post-test and the delayed post-test were compared, a statistically significant difference was found (38.304 versus 43.630,  $MD = -5.326$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). A significant difference was also found between the pre-test and the delayed post-test (37.413 versus 43.630,  $MD = -6.217$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results reveal that the experimental students perceived a more positive classroom atmosphere in their English grammar classes at the delayed post-test time.

The control group scored lower in the post-test than in the pre-test (127.064 versus 124.617). The mean difference of 2.477 was not statistically different ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, when the post-test and the delayed post-test were compared, a significant difference was found (124.617 versus 131.106,  $p < 0.001$ ). The pattern was also found to be significantly different between the pre-test and the delayed post-test (127.064 versus 131.106,  $MD = 4.403$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The results revealed that the control students perceived a significant improvement in class Atmosphere.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The first implication is that language teachers ought to seriously consider introducing games as a regular and integrated strategy, in order to improve both their students' grammatical accuracy and their use of the language, thus improving their correctness and their listening/speaking competence, as suggested for example by Garcia-Carbonell, Rising, Montero and Watts (2001), Hong (2002), Macedonia (2005), Gaudart (1999) and Shie

(2003).

Also using games in classroom improved level of student motivation to study a language. This implies that language teachers who commonly experience difficulties with students' apathy, disinterest, passivity and boredom during language classes could find a partial solution when games are an integrated part of teaching and learning.

In fact, the learners in my experimental group said that they were not only more motivated by being exposed to the use of games, but also more active and happy to be in their language classes, more ready to help each other, more willing to use English in order to improve their speaking skills, as well as their written skills.

A crucial pedagogical implication, therefore, points to the positive effect of the regular use of games on the improvement of students' oral competence. The third important pedagogical implication touches on the need to revise the content and approach of language textbooks. Textbook writers would be advised to consider the first two implications and to include a variety of language games in what they write. Again, what is called for is not a sporadic presence of a few games, but rather a substantial and pervasive integration of games into every chapter. A further pedagogical implication suggested by the results of this study relates to the field of teacher training in Iran and in places where games have not been adopted as yet. Games as learning and teaching strategies that can effectively motivate learners are introduced into classes with a great deal of fear and trepidation. It is a pity that games have been sidelined for a very long time in Iran.

## REFERENCES

- Abu Jeld, R. (2004). *Development project based on teaching grammar*. Educational Development Centre, UNRWA, Gaza.
- Anderson, J. (1993). Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in China? Pros and cons. *System*, 21(4), 471-480.
- Carrier, M. (1985). *Take 5: games and activities for the language learner*. An international Thomson Publishing Company.
- Deesri, A. (2002). Games in the ESL and EFL class. Retrieved June 17, 2003, from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Deesri-Games.html>.
- Engel, D., & Myles, F. (1996). Grammar teaching: The major concerns. In D. Engel & F. Myles (Eds.), *Teaching grammar: Perspective in higher education*. London: Association for French Language Studies, the Center for Information on Language Teaching and Research.
- Gary, R., Marrone, S., & Boyles, C. (1998). *The use of gaming strategies in a transcultural setting*. Retrieved November 11, 2002, from <http://global.umi.com/pqdweb?INT=0&SelLanguage=0&TS=1043287741&Did=00000>.
- Hadfield, J. (2002). *Elementary communication games (3rd ed.)*. Hong Kong: Thomas and

Nelson Sons Ltd.

- Hamdona, Y. (2007). Life skills latent in the content of English for Palestine-grade six textbook, M.A thesis, the Islamic university of Gaza, Gaza.
- Hamrick, P. (2008). The Effectiveness of Cognitive Grammar and Traditional Grammar in L1 Pedagogy: An Empirical Test. [online] unpublished M.A thesis, Youngstown State University. Retrieved in June 15, 2010 from: <http://etd.ohiolink.edu/sendpdf.cgi/Hamrick%20Phillip.pdf?ysu1212177577>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (1997). Grammar and its teaching: Challenging the myths. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Reproduction Services No. ED 406 829).
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (1999). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lin, H. R. (2002). *Effects of communicative language teaching on English learning and cultural learning for children*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, National Kaohsiung Normal University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan.
- Mclaughlin, S. (2004). Teaching young learners of English. Al-Qattan Center for educational research and development, Qattan Foundation, Ramallah, Palestine.
- Madylus, O. (2002). Teaching teenagers grammar. Retrieved December 8, 2002, from: [http://www.onestopenglish.com/News/Magazine/children/teaching\\_grammar.htm](http://www.onestopenglish.com/News/Magazine/children/teaching_grammar.htm)
- Misirli, S. (2007). Three "Co" games: collocation, cooperation and communication in EFL classes. *The internet TESL Journal*, vol. XIII, No.8. Retrieved in June 15, 2010 from: <http://iteslj.org/lessons/Misirli-ThreeGames.html>
- Swan, M. (2005). *Practical English usage* (3rd ed). Oxford University Press, UK
- Thornbury, S. (2004). *How to Teach Grammar?* Pearson Education, England.
- Vasilopoulos, G. (2008). Adapting Communicative Language Instruction in Korean Universities. *The internet TESL Journal*, vol. XIV, No. 8. Retrieved in July 8, 2010 from: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/vasilopoulos-CLT.html>
- Yu, S. (2005). The effects of Games on the acquisition of some grammatical features of L2 German on students' Motivation and on classroom atmosphere. [online] Unpublished PhD thesis, faculty of Education, Catholic University, Australia. Retrieved in Dec 18, 2007 from: <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/digitalthesis/publicadt%2DacuvP98:29052006>