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How effective are L1 Games in Improving the Understanding of English Grammar for University Students?

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Abstract

This study reveals the university students' responses on how effective is the use of L1 games in increasing their understanding of English (L2) grammar. It is worthy of note to discover how the use of Indonesian (L1) games could improve the students' grammar comprehension. The purposes of this study are to discover the university students' opinion of using games in any grammar classes they have experienced, their feedback on the use of L1 games in learning L2 grammar, and the effectiveness of the use of L1 games in improving their understanding of L2 grammar. The data were obtained from the two questionnaires distributed to 43 Indonesian university students, who took Grammar: Verb Patterns class, in two different meetings and also from class observation in four consecutive class meetings. The data were analyzed by counting the students' opinion in the two questionnaires one by one and then putting them into several tables with certain categories. The findings show that the use of L1 games are effective for improving students' grammar comprehension. By engaging in L1 games, students learn L2 grammar in a more enjoyable yet meaningful way. As a result, their English grammar understanding will increase remarkably together with their enjoyment in participating in the games. Results from the study provide insights and strategies for any university lecturers in providing their students with L1 games to improve their students' comprehension of English grammar. The result of this study can also be used for any teachers to include their L1 games in teaching English grammar to their students.

Keywords: L1 games, effectiveness, L2 grammar

Introduction

It is undeniable that English learners are all over the world, especially those whose mother tongue is not English. This phenomenon happens because people throughout the world have accepted English language as the international language that is used for communicating between nations. People will commonly learn English language first compared to other languages in the world if they intend to go internationally, either going for travelling, business trip, or studying abroad.

The spread of English language has also been acknowledged by Kachru (1982) and Crystal (1997) as they classify it in three circles: "inner circle which refers to nations using the language as their mother tongue, outer circle which includes those from some 55 ex-British colonial countries, and expanding circle which includes the nations that recognize the importance of English as an international language" (as cited in Jazadi, 2004, p. 5). As Indonesia is included in the expanding circle; therefore, English language is considered as a foreign language.

In order to be able to master a foreign language, a learner should be familiar with the grammar of that particular language besides the vocabularies of that language. It is even better if the learner understand and able to apply those grammar patterns into real life situation, especially for expressing ideas that are important in communication. However, English grammar is considered a difficult and challenging subject for many teachers and students whose mother tongue is far different with English language. One of the

difficulties is caused by various English grammar patterns that have to be mastered whereas the challenge is related to how teachers can make students comprehend those patterns and apply them correctly. By using games in teaching grammar, teachers will be able to provide students with the opportunities to practice the grammar patterns that they have learnt. As a result, the students will hopefully be motivated to use the grammar patterns more when they are playing games compared to doing the grammar exercises in a conventional way. The students are also expected to understand the grammar patterns better if they use them actively in games. Due to the difficulties in learning English grammar, especially for those students whose mother tongue is far different from English; therefore, it is necessary to conduct a research on the use of games in learning English grammar to know the effect of games in improving the students' English grammar understanding.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose this study is to discover the university students' opinion on learning grammar in general, how often they have used games when they learn grammar, the students' feedback on the use of Indonesian (L1) games in learning English (L2) grammar as well as whether the L1 games is effective or not for the students' grammar comprehension, also the students' preferences on using L1 games in the following grammar meetings. The result of this study will provide insights and strategies for teachers, especially university lecturers, in providing their students with L1 games for improving their comprehension of English grammar.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follow:

1. What do the university students think about learning grammar in general and the use of games in grammar classes they have had in the previous years?
2. What are the university students' opinions on the use of L1 games in learning L2 grammar?
3. How effective is the use of L1 games in learning L2 grammar for the university students?
4. What are the university students' response about using L1 games in the following grammar meetings?

Theories

Foreign language learning consists of several components, including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one's own or another culture (Thanasoulas, 2001, p. 1). As Crystal (2004) defines grammar as "the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in English." In line with Thanasoulas' (2001) statement and Crystal's (2004) definition, grammar is essential in learning a language, especially in second or foreign language learning where learners cannot depend on their intuition. Therefore, learners should comprehend the grammatical rules and know how to apply them correctly. They also need to acknowledge any grammatical variations that occur in daily life situation.

However, acquiring a second language is not an easy task to do, as Gardner (1979) and Williams (1994) point out learning a second language is a combination of learning a language and also understanding its culture. They further mention that grammatical rules and vocabularies can be learnt at school, but it needs more effort to get involved in the social situation and to be familiar with the culture of the language.

Moreover, Cohen and Dornyei (1998, 2001) agree that learner's success in learning a second language depends on a variety of factors: the length of time of the language course, the teacher's characteristics and competence of a certain subject, the suitability of the teaching methods, the textbook quality, the number of learners in a classroom, the amount of L2 practice, and the learner's characteristics which is the most important feature in achieving a language. Gardner (2001), in accordance with Cohen and Dornyei (1998, 2001), strongly states that motivation is the important key to learner's success in acquiring a language. As it is stated by Heckhausen (1991), motivation refers to "goal-directed behavior" (as cited in Masgoret, Gardner, 2003, p. 173). While Gardner further explains that L2 motivation can be defined as the mixture of effort and willingness to achieve the goal of learning a language and it is also combined with supporting attitudes toward learning a language.

Motivate students is not as easy as flipping one's palm. Although Burgess and Etherington (2002) argued that explicit grammar teaching is believed to be favored by students due to their expectations and insecure feelings (as cited in Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011, p. 71), teachers need to implement activities that are fun yet educational. One of the ways to motivate students to learn is through games. As Hadfield (1999) defines a game as "an activity with rules a goal, and element of fun...games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term." In line with Hadfield, Tuan and Doan (2010) states that "games serve not only as an amusing activity, but as a techniques to carry out tasks to learners amusingly as well." Hadfield (1999) further adds that teachers can use controlled games to help students memorize or repeat the language or free practice games to provide students to use the language freely. Besides, he argues that teachers can use games as a tool to diagnose students' difficulties as well as to help them face their problems in language. Moreover, Deesri (2002) argues that students usually feel stressful when they learn unfamiliar grammatical rules; therefore, games are needed to lessen the level of anxiety and to help students willing to learn more. Tuan and Doan (2010) further state that by playing games, learners will be eager and willing to practice the language that they have studied; therefore, when they are engaging in the game, they are learning the language as well. According to Yolageldili and Arikan (2011), games are very important in English language learning, both for the teachers and students, due to games make them enjoy and relax, and also encourage them to use English creatively and communicatively (p. 219). Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) further add that by playing games, students focus on the message, not the language; therefore, they learn the message unconsciously.

There are two types of games as classified by Hadfield (1999): linguistic games which "focus on accuracy, such as supplying the correct antonym" (as cited in Tuan and Doan, 2010, p. 68) and communicative games which "focus on successful exchange of information and ideas, such as two people identifying the differences between their two pictures which are similar but not exactly alike" (as cited in Tuan and Doan, 2010, p. 68). Comparing the two types of games, Hadfield (1999) further adds that in communicative games, the communicative goal is more important than the correct use of language. Moreover, Lee (2000) classifies games into ten types, they are: structure games, vocabulary games, pronunciation games, number games, listen-and-do games, games and writing, miming and role play, discussion games (cited in Pham, 2007).

Several researchers have argued that games provide positive impact for students; they are: Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984), Hansen (1994), Rinvoluci and Davis (1995), Nguyen and Khuat (2003), and Riedel (2008). According to Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984), games "help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work, also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful." Hansen (1994) argues that learners are motivated and entertained by the use of games, especially shy learners

who will express their ideas and emotions more when they play games. Rinvoluci and Davis (1995) add that “competitive activities that hit pairs against pairs and threes against threes are excellent for fostering collaboration and mutual help within each team”. According to Nguyen and Khuat (2003), by playing games, students usually learn better because they feel relax. Riedel (2008) further asserts that teachers teach “a new generation of students, which requires unconventional teaching strategies be put into practice in the classroom.” He also declares that students will express their opinions and be benefited from it; they will also learn more and achieve better scores when they play games.

Literature Review

So far there are several recent researches dealing with the use of games in grammar classes. Nguyen (2005) conducted a research which involved 100 students and 10 teachers in Nong Lam University, Vietnam. He included games and used them communicatively in teaching grammar. He wanted the students learnt grammar and had fun at the same time. He concluded that games is important as they provided practices and fun classroom activities.

Luong (2009) conducted a research in the use of games in teaching grammar to sixth graders in Vietnam. The research happened in two ways. First, the survey involved eight teachers and 225 students from three schools. Second, the experimental project involved 82 students in three months. From the research, it was found that there the students’ grammar ability greatly improved both in oral and written tests.

Hamzah and Dourado (2010) conducted a research focuses on the effect of games in teaching simple present and simple past tense to 56 lower secondary level students in SMK Damai Jaya, Malaysia. There were two groups in the research: experimental where the participants played games in grammar class and control group where they did not have any games in the grammar class. Hamzah and Dourado (2010) also interviewed four English teachers to know their feedback regarding the use of games in teaching grammar. They also did class observation and pre-test and post-test to know the participants’ improvement. They found that the students in experimental group were more enthusiastic and motivated in learning grammar by using games and the teachers also supported the use of games in teaching grammar positively.

Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) conducted a research on using games in teaching grammar to young learners from the grammar teachers’ perspectives. They distributed questionnaires to 15 Turkish EFL teachers who came from six different primary state schools. Based on the questionnaires, they discovered that the teachers thought games is effective in teaching grammar, especially to young learners. However, the teachers had not used games frequently in the classroom.

Hartani (2012) explored the effectiveness of mime game in teaching present continuous tense to 30 fifth graders aged 11-12 years old in Samarinda, Indonesia. These students were divided into two groups: experimental group and control group. The first group played mime game for three meetings (45 minutes each) after being given the explanation about present continuous tense whereas the latter were only given oral and written exercises. After these three meetings, the teacher gave the same tests to both groups. Hartani (2012) also interviewed and observed the students. She found that mime game was effective in teaching grammar to young learners. The students enjoyed the game and understood present continuous better.

Based on recent researches above, it can be seen that using games are proven effective in teaching grammar to students, who most of them are young learners. However, none of these studies uses L1 games in teaching grammar. Therefore, it is needed to discover whether L1 games will be effective or not in teaching L2 grammar to university students.

Participants of the Research

The participants in this research are 43 students of English Department, Maranatha Christian University, Bandung, Indonesia. These students were from two parallel classes of Grammar: Verb Patterns in the third semester. The first class is every Monday at 9.30-11.10 a.m. whereas the second class is every Wednesday at 1-2.40 p.m. Each meeting lasts for 100 minutes. All participants are Indonesians. Most of them are Bandungnese. Some participants are from outside Java island. They are from Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected from the two questionnaires distributed to the students and the observation done for four consecutive meetings. The first questionnaire was distributed on Monday, August 24, 2015 and on Wednesday, August 26, 2015. These meetings were the first meetings for both classes. The second questionnaire was distributed on Monday, September 28, 2015 and on Wednesday, September 30, 2015. These meetings were the last meetings for both classes before the mid-term examination. The first questionnaire consists of four questions that ask the students' opinions regarding grammar, the use of games in their previous grammar classes, the benefit of games in understanding grammar rules, and the students' preferences on including games in their grammar class. The second questionnaire consists of three questions that ask the students' opinion on how effective is the use of L1 games in understanding grammar rules, whether the use of Indonesian(L1) help the students comprehend the rules, and whether they want to play the same game in the following meetings.

The observation was done for four consecutive meetings: from the second until the fifth meetings in both classes. As the lecturer of the participants, I went around the classroom and monitored the students when they were playing the L1 games. The games were played in the class for four consecutive meetings after the lecturer finished explaining the grammar rules. Sometimes the students played the games after they finished doing the grammar exercises provided in their grammar handout. The types of games and variation of the games used were stated in the following sections.

Two weeks were spent in collecting students' opinion through questionnaires and eight meetings (four meetings for each class) were spent in observing the students when they were playing the L1 games. I also spent another week for counting the data.

Type of Games Used

The students were asked to play a game called "Grammar Master of the Day" for about 10-15 minutes in the end of the second until the fifth meetings. In this game, the students formed a group of three. The members of the group were chosen by the lecturer by pointing to student A with B and C, etc. Afterwards, each group drew a lottery to find one winner. He or she as the winner acted as the grammar master of the day. The grammar master meant that the particular student became the private teacher for the other members of the group. The grammar master's task was to review the grammar rules that had been learnt in the particular meeting by using Indonesian (L1). If the other members of the group had difficulty in understanding the grammar rules explained, those members could ask questions regarding the problems faced. Therefore, the grammar master should answer the questions as clearly as possible until the other members of the group understood.

Variation of the Games Used

Instead of chosen by the lecturers, the students could choose their own group members for the game. They usually chose the members who they were close with. Besides reviewing the grammar rules that had been learnt in the particular meeting, the students were assigned to chosen exercises for their discussion. The answers to these exercises were already discussed with the lecturer. However, the grammar master of the day should review the answers to his or her group members. The more important thing was the grammar master should explain how the answers could be like that in Indonesian. Sometimes, the students were given new exercises that they had to discuss in groups. The grammar master became the leader for the group to find the answers to those new exercises. Afterwards, the lecturer asked the correct answer from each group then discussed and wrote them on the board.

Findings

The findings are arranged based on the answers to the first and the second questionnaire, also from the observation result.

7.1 The students' answers in the first questionnaire

7.1.1 Students' opinion of grammar in general

Table 1

Students' opinion of grammar

Opinion	Number of Students
Difficult	23
Medium	10
A bit difficult	4
Sometimes difficult but sometimes not	3
Confusing	3

The students were asked their opinion on grammar in general, whether it is difficult or not for them. The students admitted that they have learnt grammar since elementary school until university starting from grammar for beginners until advanced grammar. It can be seen from table 1 that out of 43 students, 23 students claimed that grammar is difficult. One student stated that it is hard because studying grammar needs high concentration and he/she cannot concentrate too long due to his/her being a kinaesthetic learner. 10 students said that grammar is medium, not too difficult and not too easy. Four students mentioned that grammar is a bit difficult and three students stated that grammar is sometimes difficult but sometimes it is not. Three students said that grammar is confusing due to many grammatical theories that they had to learn.

7.1.2 Students' experiences of using games in grammar classes

Table 2

Students' experiences of using games

Experiences	Number of Students
Yes	9
No	34

The students were asked their experiences of previous grammar classes from elementary school until university, whether they have had any grammar glasses with games. It can be seen from table 2 that out of 43 students, 34 students have never had any games in

their grammar classes. However, nine of them have had games in their grammar classes, such as group competition in answering questions, putting right verbs in sentences, and hop scotch.

Students' opinion of the Benefit of Games in Understanding Grammar Rules

Table 3

Students' opinion of the benefit of games

Opinion	Number of Students
Helpful	33
Not helpful	8
A bit helpful	2

The students were asked whether games would help them understand grammar rules. It can be seen from table 3 that out of 43 students, 33 of them agreed that games will be helpful for them to comprehend rules of grammar, 8 students disagreed because they thought that they could understand grammar just by studying it by themselves, whereas two students said that games will give a little help in comprehending grammar rules.

Students' preferences on including games in their grammar class

Table 4

Students' preferences on including games

Preferences	Number of Students
Yes	34
No	9

The students were questioned on their preference of using games or not in this particular grammar class that they are studying. It can be seen from table 4 that out of 43 students, 34 of them wanted games, but 9 of them refused it. Those who refused games mentioned that they could learn grammar by themselves. They did not need any games to help them comprehend the grammar rules.

The students' answers in the second questionnaire

Students' opinion of the effectiveness of games

Table 5

Students' opinion of the effectiveness of games

Opinion	Number of Students
Effective	30
Sometimes	6
Not effective	6
No opinion	1

In this part, the students were asked whether L1 games used in the class for four consecutive meetings have helped them understand grammar rules. It can be seen from table 5 that among 43 participants, 30 of them agreed that games have supported them in comprehending rules of grammar, six of them said that games sometimes helpful but sometimes not, whereas six others stated that games did not give them help related to understanding grammar rules. There was one student who did not give his/her opinion.

Students' opinion on the use of Indonesian language in the games

Table 6

Students' opinion of the use of Indonesian

Opinion	Number of Students
Helpful	40
Not helpful	3

In this part, the students were asked whether they were helped by the use of Indonesian language when they were playing the games. It can be seen from table 6 that 40 students out of 43 were really helped by speaking in Indonesian when they were playing the games, whereas 3 of them said that English should be used instead of Indonesian language since they were studying English grammar.

1.2.1 Students' preferences of keeping the L1 games

Table 7

Students' preferences of keeping the games

Preferences	Number of Students
Yes	29
No	13
Maybe	1

In this part, the students were asked whether they would like to keep the L1 games in their future grammar meetings since they would have six more meetings after their mid-term test. It can be seen from table 7 that out of 43 students, 29 students agreed to keep the L1 games, one student was not certain whether to keep it or not, whereas 13 students refused it. The reasons for their refusal were the fact that if the grammar master was incapable of explaining the rules, the other group members became confused; besides, they thought that they could learn by themselves without playing the games. One of the students who agreed to keep the games, gave an alternative to the game, such as instead of becoming a grammar master in a group, he or she could stand in front of the class to exchange with the lecturer.

The result of the observation

The lecturer observed the students when they were playing the L1 games for four consecutive meetings in two parallel classes. There is the main difference between these classes. Since the first class is every Monday morning, whereas the second class is every Wednesday afternoon, it turns out that the students in the first class were eager and more excited to pay attention to the lecture given and to play the games. However, students in the second class were commonly quite sleepy in the class since most of them had just had their lunch and several of them admitted that they usually took a nap during this class time. As a result, several of them sometimes lost their concentration and were less motivated to play the games.

For the first time the students were introduced to L1 games, they were quite confused what to do. One student refused to become the grammar master. He mentioned that he was not good at teaching. However, the rest of the students tried to play the games as they could.

For the second until the fourth times of playing the games, the students got used to them and they enjoyed more playing the games. None of the students refused to play the

games. Some of them even were willing to be the grammar master without being chosen by the other members of the group. The grammar masters always tried hard to explain the grammar rules to the other members of the group. When the lecturer went around the classroom and checked how the students played the games and their understanding of the grammar rules, sometimes several groups asked questions related to the grammar rules discussed. They did not dare to ask questions when the lecturer explained the grammar rules in front of the class; nonetheless, they usually asked questions when the lecturer was close to them and while they were playing the games.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that most of the participants do not have any experiences of playing games in grammar classes. After having the opportunities to play L1 games in the Grammar: Verb Patterns class, they consider that they have benefited from it in learning grammar and understanding the rules of grammar. The students also prefer to use the same or similar game in the following meetings after the mid-term examination. Moreover, they have also been helped by the use of Indonesian in the games. They feel more relaxed and easier to explain the rules of grammar by using their native language.

The findings are in line with Hansen's (1994) and Riedel's (2008) statement that games will result in learners' being motivated and entertained, especially those shy learners; also learners' expressing their ideas more. From the observation result, it can be seen that the students are more motivated and entertained when they are playing the games. Besides, they are learning the grammar rules at the same time. For those shy learners, the L1 games have offered the opportunities for them to speak up in front of their group members and dare to ask questions to the lecturer. The students have benefited from the games, at the same time, the lecturer could monitor the students' understanding of the grammar rules explained as well as their problems related to those rules.

The findings are also in line with Hadfield's (1999) argument that games can be used to diagnose students' difficulties. As can be seen from the observation result that several students asked questions during the game when the teacher was near them. If the students did not play the games, the teacher would not know their problems related to particular grammar rules discussed. Moreover, the findings are also in line with Tuan and Doan (2010) that games make students willing to practice the language and to learn it at the same time. Based on the second questionnaire result, it can be seen that the students admitted that games are helpful in understanding the grammar rules. It means that the students practice the grammar rules when they are playing games and they also learn the rules at the same time.

Limitations of the Study

Although the findings have shown the effectiveness of using L1 games in teaching grammar to university students, there are also several limitations of this study. First, the small scale of the study and how the research was conducted. There were only 43 participants in the class and only four observation in each class. It means that the students in each class could only play the L1 games for four times. I am sure the result of the study will be better if there are more participants involved in the study and more opportunities to play games are given, the participants are divided into two groups: experimental and control, and there are post-tests. Therefore, the result from the two groups could be compared. The result of the effectiveness of the games can be seen not only from the questionnaire, observation, but also the test score. Second, there are other factors contribute to one's understanding of grammar. Among of them are students' previous grammar knowledge and ability. It is possible that those students with better previous grammar knowledge and ability will perform better even if they do not play games during grammar classes.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As can be seen from the findings, it can be concluded that the use of L1 games has been proven effective. The games have helped the students to review the grammar rules that they have learnt. They also get the opportunities to express their ideas dealing with the grammar rules and solving the problems in the exercises they have done. Moreover, the use of Indonesian has helped the students to understand grammar rules better. Therefore, L1 games has supported the students to comprehend grammar rules in an educational yet more fun way. As a university lecturer, I am of the opinion that if games could help learners in understanding grammar rules, then, it is our task as teachers or lecturers to give the opportunities to our students to play games more in any grammar classes that we teach. The students could feel relax, entertained, but they learn English grammar at the same time. As teachers or lecturers, we are also benefited from the close relationship that we could create when our students are playing games. They would ask questions more when the teachers or lecturers are close to them since the situation is more relaxing when they are playing games. Hopefully, when the students' understanding of grammar increases, they will achieve better scores in grammar classes. Thus, further research is recommended to discover the effect of using L1 games in university students' better grammar scores.

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Appendix

Questionnaire 1

Answer the following questions as clearly as possible. No need to write your name.

What do you think of grammar in general? Is it difficult, medium or easy?

Have you had any grammar classes with the use of games? If yes, what games were used?

Do you think games can help you to understand grammar rules?

Do you want games in Grammar: Verb Patterns class?

Questionnaire 2

Answer the following questions as clearly as possible. No need to write your name.

How effective is the L1 games for you in understanding the grammar rules?

Do you think the use of Indonesian (L1) in the games help you understand grammar rules explained?

Do you want to keep the L1 games in the future grammar meetings?