# Managing Effective Grammar-Focused Instruction: The Instruction and Reinforcement of Grammar through Games

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**ABSTRACT:** *Malaysian ESL learners have often been criticized that their communicative competence is limited and although they have learned English for at least eleven years at school level and a few years of tertiary education, majority of them still show difficulties in employing the language. The author upholds that grammatical competence is the root of the issue and grammar-focused instruction is crucial and must be executed in an entertaining way gift-wrapped into games. Language instructors' management skills is vital in establishing effective grammar instruction through games not only to create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere but also to make language classes more appealing. This paper aims to present an overview of the vital contribution of grammatical competence in acquiring English language communicative competency and proficiency, and the management of effective grammar-focused instruction and reinforcement through games. The author concludes that language teaching and learning in almost zero English context must always be learner-centered, whole language–based, content–centered and cooperative in order to engage them in the pragmatic, functional and authentic use of the target language for meaningful purpose which will upgrade the levels of fluency and communicative confidence.*

**KEYWORDS:** *communicative competence, grammatical competence, grammar-focused instruction, games, effective management*

## 1. Introduction

Despite significant educational development, progress and recognition both national and international, Malaysia's challenges and concerns remain as employers report that graduates that we have mould in our education system still lack the critical thinking and communication skills, and the language proficiency especially in English that are essential for success in the 21st century. Communicative language teaching and learning is indeed hard work, especially when it is learnt in a foreign language context. Most Malaysian suburban and rural school students with almost zero English language surroundings have the perception that English language is hard to understand and teachers usually face problems such as lack of interest and cooperation from these students. The other problem is the resistance that students have towards the conventional rigid drilling methods of teaching especially grammar-focused instruction. These rigid drillings and constant explanations of grammar rules and decontextualizing of grammar are a quick way for an instructor to demotivate their students and unfortunately a lot of non-native instructors in the country still fall into the comfortable trap of presenting grammar through rules as they saw it done to them when they studied a foreign language. This fact is supported by Xiao-Yun (2010:35) who asserts that traditional, explicit grammar instruction is associated with the rote learning of rules and the boring prospect of using these rules in gap-fill, pattern practice, substitution transformation, and translation, which cause negative feelings. Krashen (1987:22) also casts doubt on gap-fill and rote-learning being successful techniques of language acquisition. Consequently, to date we still struggle to produce students, who majority come from almost zero English context, with the desired communicative competence and proficiency.

In our professional musing on teaching and learning, the dichotomy between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has sometimes been over generalized, although distinguishing the two is not only significant but also crucial to insure language acquisition and retention. As Brown (2001) underlined "second language learning contexts are those in which the classroom target language is readily available out there……whereas foreign language contexts are those in which students do not have ready-made contexts for communication beyond their classroom," whereby initiatives must be made to create opportunities such as through language clubs, media, books or even occasional tourists. Bearing the difference in mind, it is definitely very important for language teachers to consider the pedagogical implications for a context where students have limited or no access to the target language, hence the difficulty for them to see the relevance of learning English. It is indeed

very challenging for teachers to teach in such context since these students' "immediate use of the language may seem far removed from their own circumstances, and classroom hours may be the only part of the day when they are exposed to English" (Brown, 2001, p.117). In other words, the language and learning session a teacher presents, models, elicits and treats is of great importance.

To compensate for the lack of ready communicative situations outside the classroom, Brown (2001) recommends the following guidelines to ensure effective language learning for the students:

▪ Use class time for optimal authentic language input and interaction
▪ Do not waste class time on work that can be done as homework
▪ Provide regular motivation-stimulating activities
▪ Help students to see genuine uses for English in their own lives
▪ Play down the role of tests and emphasize more intrinsic factors
▪ Provide plenty of extra-class learning opportunities, such as assigning an English-speaking TV or radio program, getting an English-speaking conversation partner, doing outside reading (news magazines, books), writing a journal or diary on their learning process
▪ Encourage the use of learning strategies outside class
▪ Form a language club and schedule regular activities

(p.117)

The implementation of such remedial measures would definitely improvise not only EFL students' communicative competence but also the form-focused instruction within the communicative framework, which according to Fotos & Ellis 1991 and Fotos 1994, ranges from explicit treatment of rules to noticing and consciousness-raising" (as cited in Brown, 2001).

Grammar is one of the most important components of linguistics. Grammar refers to the general rules of syntax and deals with the functions and forms of words in a sentence. Grammar means different things to different people and both students and teachers are likely to have different opinions on the concept of teaching grammar in EFL classroom, hence a controversial issue among language teachers and researchers. There has been ample evidence and support for the view that, in order to develop learners' grammatical accuracy we need classroom activities which encourage learners to focus on forms within a meaningful, communicative context (Doughty and Williams, 1998). The ongoing concern of Malaysian teachers and researchers is to make students use English language communicatively. So, communicative activities and techniques are deemed important. Games are an example of the most preferable communicative activities amongst students. The use of games highlights not only the competence but also the performance of the learners in a grammar lesson. The use of games has become a necessity in teaching grammar, since it reinforces a form-discourse match. This method is a brilliant way to generate students' understanding in grammar as students get input as they play games in classroom.

Grammar is often misunderstood in the teaching field. Teachers always say that they do not know enough on how to teach grammar especially in a low-proficiency EFL class. Although it has been suggested that teachers should use communicative language teaching in classroom, most of the time teachers use the drilling method whereby a teacher teaches the grammar rules and students are later asked to answer the grammar questions. Consequently, when grammar is taught and reinforced through repetition and drills, both students and teachers will be bored.

In addition, the use of games in teaching grammar is introduced based on the concept that students should also use language in real life situations, and at the same time, teachers should not just think about teaching the correct form. Games promote real life situations by using the language in class through its communicative activities (Huyen, N.T.T. and Nga, K.T.T. (2003). However, teachers in Malaysia seem to be afraid to apply this method of teaching. They are encouraged to do so but they are afraid that students might not participate or might not learn anything from the learning session. On the other hand, those who agree with the use of games face difficulties such as time constraint and lack of planning in conducting games in classrooms.

As we are in the globalization era, the government needs to improve students' performance in English in order to produce intelligent, inventive, innovative and communicative human capital to boost the nation's economy. So, teachers are required to experiment new methods that would help students to understand, acquire and retain the grammar components; which is a prerequisite for English proficiency.

This paper aims to present the concepts of the vital contribution of grammatical competence in acquiring English language communicative competency and proficiency, and the management of effective grammar-focused instruction and reinforcement through games. The introductory part has touched in a bird's eye view on the current scenario, rationale and general concepts that bring to the development of the paper. The following parts of the paper

would first delve into grammar and grammar pedagogy which also includes a brief overview of methods of teaching grammar and the importance of grammar-focused instruction. The second part of the body narrows down to the instruction and reinforcement of grammar through games which elaborates on the definition and meaning of educational games and then, specifically focuses on the management of effective grammar-focused instruction through games. It then goes into another perspective of how effective grammar instruction through games benefits learners and ends the body of the paper on the setbacks or disadvantages of using games when it is not managed properly.

## 2.  Grammar and Grammar Pedagogy

According to Advanced Oxford Learner's Dictionary, the word 'grammar' means the rules for forming words and combining them into sentences. Halliday (2004) defines 'grammar' as the study of forms and functions in a language, and on another perspective, Thornbury (1999) states that grammar is a process of making a speaker's or writer's meaning clear when contextual information is lacking. In a more holistic manner, H. Douglas Brown defines 'grammar' in his book *Teaching by Principles – An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* as the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of morphemes or the components of words such as prefixes, suffixes, roots, verb and noun endings, etc. in a sentence.

Additionally, in elaborating the interactive approach, Brown delves into twelve overarching principles of second and foreign language learning, which are categorized as the cognitive, affective and linguistic principles, and on which language teaching should be based on. Brown's twelfth linguistic principle, Communicative Competence – a combination of organizational competence (grammatical and discourse), pragmatic competence (functional and sociolinguistic), strategic competence and psychomotor skills (pronunciation) – has provided the most important teaching principle:

"Given that communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, instruction needs to point toward all its components: organizational, pragmatic, strategic and psychomotor. Communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students' eventual need to apply classroom learning to previously unrehearsed contexts in the real world." (Brown, 2001, p. 69).

It can be clearly underlined that "grammatical competence occupies a prominent position as a major component of communicative competence" (p. 362) administering the organizational framework and constraints within which communication operates and without it, the language would simply be disorganized and chaotic. Brown strengthened his argument by highlighting Larsen-Freeman's point that "grammar is one of the three dimensions of language that are interconnected. Grammar gives us the form or the structures of language, but those forms are literally meaningless without a second dimension, that of semantics and a third dimension, pragmatics."

2.1  Methods of Teaching Grammar

There are many methods of teaching grammar. The architects of language teaching methods have been preoccupied with two basic design decisions concerning grammar. Firstly, the question of should the method adhere to a grammar syllabus and secondly, should the rules of grammar be made explicit. The questions are considered open until today and grammarians have different views about it.

What are the methods of teaching grammar? Thornbury (1999) describes several methods of teaching grammar in his book. The first method listed, Grammar-Translation Method, takes grammar as the starting for discussion. This method follows a grammar syllabus and lessons typically begin with an explicit statement of the rule. It is then followed by exercises involving translation into and out of the mother-tongue.

The second method is Direct Method. This method prioritizes oral skills. While following a syllabus of grammar structure, it rejects explicit grammar teaching. The learners are supposed to pick up the grammar in much the same way as children pick up the grammar of their mother-tongue simply by being immersed in the target language.

The other method stated is Audiolingualism. Audiolingualism is derived from the behaviorist psychology which considers language as simply a form of behaviour and to be learnt through the formation of correct habits (Brown, 2002). Habit formation is a process in which the application of the rules plays no part. The syllabus consists of a graded list of sentence patterns which form the basis of pattern-practice drills. Meanwhile, Chomsky's Natural Approach believes that language ability is not habituated behaviour but an innate human capacity (Gascoigne,

2002). This approach does away with both a grammar syllabus and explicit rule giving. Additionally, learners are exposed to large doses of comprehensible input.

Moreover, in viewing the Whole Language Approach, it can be seen that the current push in education is to teach grammar as a descriptive process, describing the language as it is used, rather than a prescriptive process, prescribing how it should be used as determined by social standards (Wolf, 1998). This approach eliminates the instruction of Standard English practices because grammar practice is boring, phonics is difficult, and nobody likes doing worksheets.

Furthermore, the other related approaches are Deductive and Inductive approaches. Deductive Approach proceeds from the general to the specific and Inductive Approach from the specific to the general. In ESL and EFL classroom instruction, the former is generally taken to mean instruction of rules and the latter is the instruction to learners to search for a rule. Littlewood (1981) defines the two as follows: 'Inductive learning means that examples are encountered before rules are inferred. Deductive learning means that rules are presented before examples are encountered'.

Meanwhile, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) believes that communicative competence consists of more than just the knowledge of grammar. Shallow-end CLT does not reject grammar teaching out of hand. Grammar is still the main syllabus of CLT courses. On the other hand, deep-end CLT rejects both grammar-based syllabuses and grammar instruction. Students work through a syllabus of tasks for which no formal grammar instruction is needed or provided. In Malaysia, CLT principles have formed the foundation of English Language syllabi. CLT has been adopted in Malaysia since 1970's. Yalden (1987) summarizes the essence of CLT as:

"It is based on the notion of the learners as communicators, naturally endowed with the ability to learn languages. It seeks to provide learners with the target language system. It is assumed that learners will have to prepare to use the target language (orally and written forms) in many predictable and unpredictable acts of communication which arise both in classroom interaction and in real-world situation, whether concurrent with language training or subsequent to it."

2.2  The Importance of Grammar – Focused Instruction

Klauer (1998), a school master and a textbook writer writes:

**"**No man can rub speedily to the mark of language that is shackled........with grammar precepts."

He says that grammar could be picked up through simply communicating, for example, by doing exercise of reading, writing and speaking. Klauer (1998) questions the value of grammar instruction and together with other educators, he involves in grammar debates. It is said that the history of grammar-focused instruction is essentially the history of claims and counterclaims for and against the teaching of grammar. Differences in attitude towards the role of grammar underpin the differences between methods, between teachers and between learners.

Meanwhile, Thornbury (1999), in his book 'How to teach Grammar', quotes some statements on the attitudes and perceptions towards grammar. The following are the examples:

There is no doubt that knowledge – implicit or explicit – of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of language.
(Penny Ur, a teacher trainer, an author of *Grammar Practice Activities*)
The effects of grammar teaching…..appear to be peripheral and fragile.
(Stephen Krashen, an influential, if controversial, applied linguist)
A sound knowledge of grammar is essential if pupils are going to use English creatively**.**
(Tom Hutchinson, a course book writer)
Grammar is not very important: The majority of languages have a very complex grammar. English has little grammar and consequently it is not very important to understand it.
(From the publicity of a London language school)
Grammar is not the basis of language acquisition and the balance of linguist research clearly invalidates any view to the contrary.
(Michel Lewis, a popular writer on teaching methods)

There are also many arguments for putting grammar in the forefront of second and foreign language teaching. Some say that grammar should be the focus in classroom instructions. Thornbury (1999) states seven arguments for the case of grammar:

- The sentence-machine argument

Learners face a part of language learning which is called 'item-learning'. It is the memorization of individual items such as words or phrases. A person can retain and retrieve a limited number of items.

Learners need to learn some patterns or rules to enable them to generate new sentences. Grammar is a description of the regularities in a language, and knowledge of these regularities provides the learner with the means to generate a potentially enormous number of original sentences. So grammar is a kind of 'sentence-making machine' and it offers the learners the means for potentially limitless linguistic creativity.

- The fine tuning argument

It is possible to get a lot of communicative mileage out of simply stringing words and phrases together but still the language fails to deliver in terms of intelligibility and appropriation. This is particularly the case for written language, which generally needs to be more explicit than spoken language. Some sentences might confuse the reader and the messages could not be delivered clearly. So the teaching of grammar serves as a corrective against the kind of ambiguity that learners make.

- The fossilization argument

Learners need to have formal study if they want to achieve amazing level of language proficiency. Learners who informally learn a language have difficulties in their progress. Research suggests that learners who receive no instruction seem to be at risk of fossilizing sooner than those who do receive instruction.

- The advance-organizer argument

Grammar instruction might also have delayed effects. A learner might notice that the grammatical items he learns in a class appear in his interaction. Noticing is a prerequisite for acquisition. The grammar teaching a learner has received can prim him to notice what might otherwise have gone unnoticed, and hence can influence his learning. It is a kind of advance organizer for the later acquisition.

- The discrete item argument

Grammar can help to reduce the apparent enormity of the language learning task for both teachers and students. Grammarians make the language digestible by organizing it into discrete items. A discrete item is any unit of the grammar system that is sufficiently and   narrowly defined to form the focus of a lesson or an exercise. Each discrete item can be isolated from the language that normally envelops it. It can then be slotted into a syllabus of other discrete items, and targeted for individual attention and testing.

- The rule of law

Since grammar is a system of learnable rules, it lends itself to a view of teaching and learning known as transmission. A transmission view sees the role of education as the transfer of a body of knowledge from those that have the knowledge to those that do not. Grammar offers teachers a structured system that can be taught and tested in methodical steps.

- The learner expectations argument

Many learners come to language classes with fairly fixed expectations as to what they will do there. They expect that teaching will be grammar-focused. They enroll in language classes to ensure that the learning experience will help them in improving their language proficiency.

Moreover, Pienemann (1984) demonstrates that subjects who receive grammar instruction progress to the next stage after a two-week period, a passage normally taking several months in untutored development. While the number of subjects studied is small, the finding provides evidence of the efficacy of teaching over leaving acquisition to run its natural course. Larsen-Freeman (1997) also agrees on the importance of grammar instruction. She concludes that:

> "If the goals of language instruction include teaching students to use grammar accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately, then a compelling case can be made for teaching grammar. Instead of viewing grammar as a static system of arbitrary rules, it should be seen as a rational, dynamic system that is comprised of structures characterized by the three dimensions of form, meaning and use."

From the author's teaching experience in schools, he thinks that the teachers do see the importance of grammar-focused instruction in classroom. Grammar is usually taught using Deductive method and the students are then given exercises that will help them understand a particular grammar topic. The teachers indeed cover a grammar topic in a lesson but they do not include grammar when they teach the four skills. This uninteresting general scenario of grammar instruction in the EFL context in Peninsular Malaysia brings to a conclusion that majority of the teachers are still using the traditional grammar-focused instruction method. On the other hand, the school students think that grammar is important especially in writing. The higher achievers try to make no grammatical errors in their

sentences but the low achievers do not really care about committing them. The majority of students also believe that grammar exercises help them improve their understanding.

## 3. Instruction and Reinforcement of Grammar through Games

3.1 What are Games?

The need for meaningfulness in language learning has been widely accepted for some years. A useful interpretation of 'meaningfulness' is that the learners respond to the content in a definite way. If they are amused, angered, intrigued or surprised, then the content is clearly meaningful to them. Thus the meaning of the language they listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and, therefore, better remembered.

If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire. They are thus not for use solely on wet days and at the end of term! Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984) stress on the meaningful language and suggest the use of games in their book 'Games for Language Teaching'. The three authors explain that games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The use of games in grammar-focused instruction is more to a style of teaching. It comprises of all the approaches, which could be used to any, when necessary. Uberman (1998) defines games as fun activities that involve problem solving and critical thinking and also play, governed by rules.

The use of games in teaching grammar was established due to the concept that learners should also use language in real life situations, instead of just thinking about learning the correct form. Games promote real life situations use of language in class through its communicative and critical thinking activities. Malarcher and Langeling (1997) conclude that the benefits of games range from cognitive aspect of language learning to more co-operative group dynamic. The use of games affects students' affective, cognitive, class dynamic and adaptability.

Uberman (1998) explains the characteristics of grammar games. The first characteristic of grammar classroom games is that it is governed by rules so that it could be manageable in classroom situation. It also has objectives so that learning takes place. It must also be a closed activity, so that there are opening and closing for each game in a lesson. Lastly, the most important characteristic of grammar games in classrooms is that it needs teacher supervision**,** linguistically and also as controller of the game flow. There are basically four types of games suggested in classroom use by Klauer (1998). The first type of game is cooperative game. The main action of the game is centered in trying to reach the aim in cooperation. This type of game is excellent to encourage shy students since it requires the participation of all members of a team, group or pair. Some typical activities may include the completion of a drawing, putting things, finding a pair or finding hidden things. Students are involved in the exchange of information to complete the task and in giving or following instructions.

The second type of game is competitive games. As the name indicates, in this type of game there is an overt competition between teams, or sometimes of an individual against the rest of the class. The competition may also be of individuals against other individuals. The objective of this type of game is finishing or reaching the end before the other competitors, making more points, surviving elimination or avoiding penalties. The rules may require the players to produce correct language as part of the game and force students to draw conclusions more quickly. The third type of games is communicative games. The main objective in this type of game is getting the message over to the other players and reacting appropriately to their messages. For example, when giving instructions, the player giving them must be clear, and the player following them must do exactly what he or she is required to. The tasks are usually practical, like following instructions, drawing, persuading other players, etc. This means that players will concentrate on the language rather than on the task, so students can see the results of their use of language at once, which will help build students' confidence. The next type is code-control games. This type of game requires that students produce correct language; structures, spelling, pronunciation, etc. The production of correct language will make the players of the team win points.

In a lesson, it is suggested that games take place at the activity part, whereby it gives students environments to practice rules that they have learned through explanation from teachers. Games are quite inappropriate in introducing rules to students, as students may leave out some important details of the rules due to their excitement in the game activity. In today's situation, games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is time left at the end of lessons. However, according to Lee (1979), as cited in Chung (2003), games should be the heart of language instruction, and not just being regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games could also be used as revision and reinforcement activities, whereby students could recall and experiment rules that they have learned in a pleasant and interesting manner. Furthermore, Sarioban and Metin (n.d) state that games can be used for all levels. It is regardless of the proficiency, age and experience of the learners. Any appropriate activities might be applied successfully. Sarioban and Metin also highlight the importance to design clear and easy directions for the games.

3.2  Managing Effective Use of Games in Grammar Instruction

An effective use of games in grammar classroom environment promotes cooperation among students, communication and production of correct language, in a fun way. The most important part of a classroom game is how much students enjoy it. If students enjoy the game and the objectives of the lesson are achieved, a classroom game is considered successful and effective.

There are guidelines in choosing games for grammar classes since games varies and are categorized in four different types. According to Ghada Sari (2002), in order to manage effective grammar instruction through games, there are four aspects that should be considered in choosing grammar games for classroom usage, which consist of the level of the students, the length of the game, the appropriateness of the game to the objective of the language teaching and the space and equipment needed. Mubaslat (2012) adds teachers need to consider which games to use, when to use them, how to link them up with the syllabus, text book or programme, and how, more specifically, different games will benefit students in different ways. It can be clearly seen here that one of the keys to effective management of a language game in grammar instruction is that the rules must be clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun. Huyen and Nga (2003) also point out that in order to ensure effectiveness, whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account. In addition, Forte (2006) states that learning styles also play an important part in a learner's development hence the importance for instructors to understand how their students learn best. Therefore, the choice of games must suit the students' learning style and it is crucial to take it into consideration because it will help the students to acquire and retain instructions.

Vernon (2007) also stresses that instructors should have a clear linguistic outcome for each game. The game can be a listening game to allow the students to repeatedly hear a new grammatical structure in use, or it can be a speaking game to allow practice of the grammar once it has been absorbed through listening beforehand. In other words, the degrees of difficulty of speaking games, from basic repetition in a fun context to the more creative sentence creations for revision and reinforcement. It is also meant for more advanced practice once the basics have been mastered. Furthermore, Rixon (1981) suggests three key principles to manage effective use of games in the classroom. The first key principle is 'think about games'. Secondly, 'know their ingredients' and the last key principle is 'know how to vary them'.

According to Merrill (2002), upon completion of her years of review on instructional design theories, the first five principles that are common to various theories are:
(a) Learning is promoted when learners are engaged in solving real-world problems
(b) Learning is promoted when existing knowledge is activated as a foundation for new knowledge
(c) Learning is promoted when new knowledge is demonstrated to the learner
(d) Learning is promoted when new knowledge is applied by the learner
(e) Learning is promoted when new knowledge is integrated into the learner's world

From these principles summed up by Merrill (2002), The Anatomy of Good Instruction – *Tell, Show, Do and Apply Strategies* – are established. The TSDA Strategies must be implemented in order to maximize learning effectiveness as they increase learning and engagement. Briefly, the author would like to describe below the strategies language instructors ought to adopt while managing sessions of grammar-focused instruction using games to insure effectiveness.

*Tell* strategy is the first component of good and effective instruction which basically requires an instructor to provide learners with key information related to their learning such as facts, concepts, rules and procedures, for instance, telling them the specific steps they would go through and even to the extent of showing a visual outline of the steps. The next strategy, *Show,* demonstrates what an instructor wants the learners to do and what the instructor wants to teach. Through this strategy, instructors would be able to help learners see how the information they told them is applied. After demonstrating a variety of examples, instructors should then provide opportunities for learners to *Do* what they have taught them. It is of utmost importance that instructors give learners plenty of feedback and guidance as they apply what they have learned in order for them to improve their abilities at this stage.  In the final strategy, learners plan how they are going to apply their knowledge and ability to excel in the game. At the end of the grammar game, instructors must review learners' performance and revise and reinforce the content of the game. These strategies, which also aligns well with Gagne's Events of Instruction, when conscientiously applied will definitely increase learners' learning instruction effectiveness.

3.3  How Effective Grammar Instruction through Games Benefits Learners

There are many reasons why the use of games in grammar instruction and reinforcement is introduced as one of the styles in teaching English, particularly grammar. First and foremost, it gives a lot of benefits to both students and instructors in the grammar classroom. Huyen and Nga (2003) say that effective use of games in grammar instruction and reinforcement brings relaxation and fun for students, enabling them to retain new words and rules more effectively. Games activities breakaway from the conventional, rigid drilling method of teaching whereby instructors do all the talking and students are obliged to get the answers right through multiple attempts.

Games are a welcoming break from the usual routine of the language class (Kim, 1995) as students nowadays are easily stressed out when they are taught using the traditional method of grammar instruction. The communicative and fun elements of games in grammar instruction appeals better to them. Students learn better when they are relaxed, and this transpires when games are used as equipment in grammar-focused instruction. Sarioban and Metin (n.d) explain that games reduce stress in the classroom since while playing games, the learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. As a result, students acquire language unconsciously while they are engaged in the activity.

Managing effective use of games in grammar-focused instruction also increase students' confidence and participation in class (Mei and Yu-jing, 2000). These benefits and advantages could be achieved by using the communicative and cooperative types of games. Compared to the conventional way of grammar instruction and reinforcement, the use of games promotes interaction amongst students and also between the students and the instructor. The process of completing a game task in groups promotes interaction in the targeted language and the environment created by using games in grammar classroom is effective in helping students to practice language and use grammar rules which have been taught by their teacher. In fact, this is also supported by Zdybiewska (1994), who believes games to be a good way of practicing language, for they provide a model of what learners will use the language for in real life.

Another benefit of using games in grammar-focused instruction is that it eliminates students' resistance on learning English, particularly grammar, due to their assumptions that it is hard to learn grammar. The fun and interesting elements of games help students to cooperate and willingly learn grammar. Erzos (2000) holds that games are highly appreciated thanks to their amusement and interest, and also the fact that instructors can use games to help their students practice more the skills of communication. When these resistance and assumptions are eliminated, students could learn grammar effectively as they now enjoy and are willing to learn grammar. Games are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can provide shy and timid students more opportunities to express their opinions and feelings (Silvers, 1982). According to Ghada Sari (2002), by using games, an instructor gives students a unique and fun way to learn grammar. This will capture students' interest, which is the biggest advantage that games possess compared to other activities assimilated into language teaching.

Randel, Morris, Wetzel and Whitehill (1992) find that positive results obtained for retention over time favour the use of simulation or games. As games require active participation of students, the material has a greater chance of being integrated into the cognitive structures of the individuals and thus being retained. It can be concluded that games also provide a lot of space and materials for instructors and students to reinforce on lessons and rules they have learned. These games also provide endless materials for students to experiment with in a fun and interesting way.

Another advantage of games is that they are expandable whereby the activities are not rigid to certain features only. They can be creatively modified to suit the learning objectives. Additionally, with the use of games, the instructor can create various contexts in which students have to use the language to communicate, exchange information and express their own opinions (Caroll, 2003). Instructors could also create games of their own in teaching grammar. The games could be specially catered by instructors to their students' level, classroom size, cultural values and other features that are considered when executing an activity. Additionally, instructors could also assimilate cultural-based games of the community where the grammar instruction takes place. Therefore, it could be said that games are suitable in teaching grammar for any level of any size in any place in the world.

Furthermore, Carroll (2003) states that games can set the tone for meaningful and engaging lessons about language. They can bring attention to words, phrases, sentences and structures. Games can also generate wonder, awe and enthusiasm for the miracle and power of human language. She does not suggest games to replace structured and grammar study but she emphasizes that games can fine-tune students' awareness of how they might manipulate language to express ideas in a polite, powerful, persuasive, pontificating, pretentious, pouting or pompous way.

While teaching in rural and suburban schools, the author personally used games as his central content in teaching grammar and the students really enjoyed them. Since his students were mostly low-level of English Language proficiency, the use of games gave many advantages to them. Apart from attaining better understanding and exam results, those who were shy and timid also became more relaxed and took part actively in the games and

gave their full attention and cooperation. In addition, the students always reminded the author to bring more games to the classroom.

Neurological research have also acknowledged how effective grammar instruction through games benefits learners. Such research have found that emotions play a critical role in the patterning process because of the brain's reaction to certain emotions (Funderstanding: brain-based learning, 1998). It is a long established fact that the brain reacts differently to fear than it does to pleasure. Therefore, it is crucial to link it in presenting grammar to students in an interesting manner. The grammar instruction must utilize the concepts of relaxed alertness, active learning, orchestrated immersion, concrete and abstract learners and active-reflective learners. The grammar instruction should also incorporate the multiple intelligences and right- and left-brain activities.

Another neurological research by Chandrasekaran (2011) has proven that grammar reinforcement through games transfers language usage principles from working memory to long term memory resulting in better understanding and usage of English, provided that the materials and methods of teaching enhance the engagement of students and drive positive changes in the lives of the learner fraternity. The study took a sample of 30 vernacular medium students and gave conventional techniques of language teaching namely the chalk and talk and memorisation. This method initially did produce temporary results in the sense that the learners were able to reproduce essays, letters and simple grammar usage by rote learning. However, it was found that in the long term, it did not produce the desired results. Afterwards, these same students were taught using multimedia, interactive participatory activities and language games for a period of four months. It was found their learning curve was higher as they were made to actively engage themselves in the learning process. Implicitly, when cognitive skills consistently match students' learning styles, it creates optimal learning.

Shifting to an additional perspective that highly recommends the use of games in grammar-focused instruction, Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) who explored the beliefs and habits of Turkish EFL teachers' towards using games in their classes, found that most EFL teachers believed in the pedagogical value of games in language teaching and that games should be given a special role in the foreign language teaching programme as learners gain the opportunity to show their skills in grammar and other areas of language. The teachers also thought games made the instruction beneficial for learners since they lower and overcome students' anxiety towards grammar learning. The study also showed that games are motivating and entertaining way of teaching grammar to weak students. While playing a game, learners do not focus on the structures only, but they learn them unconsciously.

Moreover, a group of researcher including a statistician named Katherine Thomas, James D. Thomas and Robin Haggerty (n.d) choose two grammar topics which are sentence types and subject-verb agreement to be taught in the fall 2003 semester. Two ENC 091 classes from different campuses of the same community college are used for the experiment. They choose 'Grammar Jeopardy' to teach subject-verb agreement and a game called 'Combinations' to teach sentence types. The results of the use of the games versus traditional methods prove to cause a highly significant increase in test scores, significant even at the 1% level. The probability value is 0.013. Out of a possible score of 100, the mean of the with-game scores is 71.17. The mean of the without-game scores is 55. The results show that the use of games in teaching grammar concepts is a very successful technique for raising quiz scores.

3.4 Setbacks of Ineffective Management of Grammar Games

Even though the benefits of using games in grammar classroom are numerous, disadvantages of its implementation do exist if not efficiently managed. The obvious setback is that by using games in grammar teaching, ineffective classroom management faces the risk of being turned into a playground (Carroll, 2003). Instead of learning by playing games, it is concerned that learning does not take place and only playing occurs in the classroom. Students could be overwhelmed and overexcited by the games. They might only focus on the task, leaving the learning part of certain rules or language context embedded in the language unused. This situation could be avoided if the instructor knows how to control the classroom when games are introduced in the learning activity.

Zdybiewska (1994) raises concern that games used might not be suitable for all students in the class. Although guidelines in choosing games for grammar classroom usage exist, instructors would still face problems with classes of multiple level, age and size. The same game then would not be suitable for all. The usage of different games for different group of students in the same class would not be suitable, as it means that the instructor is not teaching the class as a whole, but are dividing it into a few sub-classes. This is among the disadvantages of using games in grammar instruction, whereby it is hard to choose the suitable games to execute the lesson (Carroll, 2003).

From the author's experience, the only problem that occurred was the students became overexcited. Therefore, the class tended to be turned into a playground. The class was very noisy and it might have interrupted other classes. The problem was later solved when he managed to control the students and they learned grammar effectively.

Lastly, on another perspective, Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) commented in their research that while EFL teachers accept the effectiveness of using games in grammar instruction, they do not use games as frequently as expected in their classrooms due to the limited time and strict schedule to study all the content and material; as well as the fact that it is rather difficult to find a game for every field of grammar. As a result, the use of games in grammar teaching and learning is often neglected.

## 4. Conclusion

The above concepts and theories of the author's research clearly illustrates that grammar is a vital prerequisite for Malaysian EFL students to achieve English communicative competence and proficiency. It has also shown that all this while instructors may have implemented the wrong method of teaching grammar in classrooms. This is crystal clear if we take the overall results of the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) into account, whereby a majority of the undergraduates are not even at the competent level even after at least 11 years of formal English learning.

The concept paper also presents a clearer picture to readers regarding the benefits of effective management of grammar instruction through games to both students and instructors. Further to that, this chapter presents not only the benefits and advantages but also the setbacks and disadvantages of games as a method in teaching grammar if not planned and managed efficiently. The author has also included the previous research which acknowledged and proved that managing effective grammar instruction through games is very much more effective than the rigid drilling method that most Malaysian instructors use in EFL classrooms. The transformation of grammar-focused instruction strategies is vital for our nation to further develop by producing the desired human capital that would fulfil its quest to become a major player in today's knowledge-based economy. With the kind of learners we have in hand now and in future, language teaching and learning must always be learner-centered, whole language–based, content–centered and cooperative in order to engage them in the pragmatic, functional and authentic use of the target language for meaningful purpose which will upgrade the levels of fluency and communicative confidence.

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