

## Fostering Active Learning of English Tenses among Teacher Trainees through Interactive Language Games

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### Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of interactive language games in enhancing teacher trainees' active participation in practicing and mastering English tenses. Traditional grammar teaching methods often lack sufficient engagement to promote sustained learning. This study examines how language games can serve as interactive instructional strategies to enhance learners' motivation and understanding of tense structures. A mixed-method research design was employed, involving a random sample of 40 pre-service teacher trainees at a National College of Education. Participants were randomly divided into two groups: control and experimental groups. Over a six-week intervention period, nine language games were introduced to the experimental group to teach nine types of English tenses. Data was collected through two written tests, classroom observations, and a student feedback questionnaire. Quantitative data, including test scores, were analyzed using averages, percentages, and ANOVA (via SPSS) to identify significant differences. Qualitative data from the observation checklists and the student questionnaire were analyzed through manual thematic analysis procedures. Findings revealed a significant improvement in students' motivation, willingness to participate, and overall confidence in using English tenses accurately in both written and spoken contexts. Moreover, the collaborative and enjoyable nature of games helped reduce learner anxiety and fostered a more interactive and supportive learning atmosphere. The results emphasize the importance of incorporating learner-centered, interactive approaches such as language games into grammar pedagogy, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a second language. Recommendations for teacher

### Introduction

educators and curriculum developers are provided to support the incorporation of game-based learning in language classrooms to improve grammatical competence among teacher trainees.

*Keywords:* Game-based learning; Interactive language games; Learner-centered approach; Mixed method; English as a Second language

Mastering English verb tenses is a fundamental component for achieving overall language proficiency and essential to the professional development of teacher trainees. English language proficiency is not only important for effective communication, but also for modeling accurate language use in their future requirements. Conventional teaching methods are often based on rote learning and tend to be teacher-centered, which often results in limited learner engagement and ineffective learning outcomes. The results of present-day examinations indicate that most students learning English as a second language have not achieved the minimum standard expected of them. In this regard, many studies have been conducted. A study by Navaz and Sama (2017), based on teaching grammar in the English language classroom: Perceptions and practices of students and teachers in the Ampara district, suggested that

teachers should use new methodologies for teaching grammar to make English grammar more interesting. Yolageldili and Arican (2011) revealed that language games promote a fun learning environment and provide students with opportunities to learn through practical and enjoyable experiences. Rosa (1998) found that the use of language games breaks down students' stereotypical learning patterns and creates more engaging learning experiences. This study highlights that interactive, learner-centered methods such as game-based activities have emerged as a promising alternative, encouraging active participation and making grammar instruction more meaningful. Game-based approaches provide opportunities for language learners to apply tense structures in real-life scenarios, improving both retention and communicative competence. According to Yaccob (2019), teachers should adjust their lessons to suit the different learning styles of students, by employing various methods, particularly language games. Willis and Willis (2013) suggest that language games allow students learning English as a second language to work in groups, thereby creating more opportunities for language use. Adeng and Shah (2012) presented the view that games are highly suitable for learning second language grammar because they create interesting communication opportunities unlike traditional school textbooks and resource books. Philpot (2003) argues that language games help make language learning more memorable and accessible

Language-based activities provide a learner-friendly environment that combines emotional, social, and cognitive elements of language learning. They support learner self-satisfaction, reduce anxiety, encourage active participation as well as the practical application of tense rules. According to Brewster and Ellis (2002), adding variety to learning situations while changing the pace of a lesson helps to maintain students' motivation. They state that games provide implicit practice in specific language patterns. Wang (2010) pointed out that the communication activities in a language game provide a context for using targeted language to convey information and engage in meaningful interaction with others.

Despite recognizing the benefits of interactive learning, there remains a considerable lack of research focused on English tense improvement programs for teacher trainees in the National Colleges of Education in Sri Lanka, especially in non-native English-speaking contexts. In particular, the exploration of learners' attitudes towards game-based methods for grammar instruction is insufficient.

This study aims to achieve the following objective:

To study the effectiveness of interactive language games in enhancing teacher trainees' active participation in practicing and mastering English tenses.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study implemented a mixed-method experimental design, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate the effect of language games on teaching English tenses to English as a second language learners.

### **Sampling Method**

Forty teacher trainees from the National College of Education were randomly selected and equally divided into an experimental and a control group. The following data collection methods were employed.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

#### **1. Two Tests**

**Pre-test:** Designed to measure the existing knowledge of tense usage among both groups.

**Post-test:** Conducted after the intervention to measure the improvement in tense-related performance of both groups.

These two tests were administered using a similar test paper, which contained twenty sentences to be completed using the correct tense form.

## 2. Classroom Observation

Conducted with a structured observation checklist focusing on students' interaction and engagement during the intervention. The experimental group of 20 participants was observed in the classroom by their English lecturer. The involvement of each student was observed using ten criteria, focused on learners' active participation, cooperation, interaction, and engagement. No observation was carried out for the control group, as the intention was to measure the effects of the intervention.

## 3. Students' Feedback Questionnaire

Administered in the Sinhala language to ensure comprehension and to collect qualitative feedback on participants' engagement and perceptions. This was conducted for the experimental group after the intervention. Before the intervention, both groups were given a pre-test to assess their existing knowledge. The experimental group received instruction on English tenses through language games, focusing on making tense practice more interactive. These activities included sentence construction games, board games, picture clues, covering nine types of tenses, and storytelling prompts with visual aids such as pictures. The control group was taught using traditional teacher-centered methods of grammar teaching involving textbook exercises and teacher-led explanations. After the intervention, both groups completed a post-test. The questionnaire and classroom observations were conducted simultaneously to gather qualitative data. Quantitative data from the two tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and statistical tests such as ANOVA to compare mean scores before and after the intervention. Quantitative data were analyzed using manual thematic analysis by converting the results of the checklist and the questionnaire into numbers where possible. The two analyses provided a mixed-method approach, combining both statistical evidence and descriptive insights into the study.

## Results

### 1. Test Performance

The test results indicated a significant improvement in the experimental group compared to the control group. The following table presents the types of language games used with the experimental group to teach tenses and the progress made by the learners after engaging in the language game activities.

**Table 1***The Overall Progress of the Two Groups in Using Tenses at the Two Tests*

Type of Tense	No. of correct answers. <b>pre-test-Experimental group</b>	No. of correct answers <b>Pre-test-control group</b>	Prevai led level	Number of correct answers. <b>Post-test Experimental group</b>	Number of correct answers. <b>Post-test control group</b>	Level of progress
Simple Present	26/60	36/60	10/60	42/60	40/60	+2/60
Simple Past	19/40	20/40	-1/40	31/40	23/40	+8/40
Simple Future	22/60	23/60	-1/60	48/60	40/60	+8/60
Present Continuous	17/40	9/40	+8/40	31/40	14/40	+17/40
Past Continuous	18/40	17/40	+1/40	22/40	20/40	+2/40
Future Continuous	13/40	22/40	-9/40	30/40	15/40	+15/0
Present Perfect	19/40	13/40	+6/40	29/40	19/40	+10/40
Past Perfect	16/40	18/40	-2/40	26/40	18/40	+8/40
Future Perfect	7/40	12/40	-5/40	19/40	7/40	+12/40

## 2. Classroom Observation

Participants in the experimental group exhibited a significant level of engagement, frequent interaction in English, and displayed greater confidence in using tenses. Peer correction and the natural use of target forms were frequently observed. The following data were collected through the checklist.

**Table 2**

*Results of the Observation Checklist*

Participant's ID (Eg)	Observation Checklist									Yes =1 No =0		Total
	C1. Pay attention in class	C2. Involves a collaborative activity with others.	C3. Attempts to do his/her work well.	1. Participates actively in	C4. Asks more questions to get	C5. Speaks in the target language	C6. Perform well in games	C7. Engages in games enthusiastically	C8. Learning seems to be fun.	C9. Expresses thoughtful ideas,		
Eg1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
Eg2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	9	
Eg3	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	6	
Eg4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
Eg5	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	9	
Eg6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	
Eg7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
Eg8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
Eg9	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	5	
Eg10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
Eg11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
Eg12	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	6	
Eg13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
Eg14	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	5	
Eg15	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	
Eg16	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	
Eg17	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	
Eg18	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	6	
Eg19	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	9	
Eg20	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	9	

### 3. Students' Feedback Questionnaire

The feedback from the questionnaire showed increased engagement, confidence, and motivation among the participants. The results revealed that most participants in the experimental group found the language games engaging and reported a better grasp of tense forms. Learners indicated that the games helped them grasp complex

tense structures more easily and increased their motivation to learn tenses. This analysis highlights the participants in the experimental group had varied experiences. They acknowledged the value of language games in learning English tenses, as they are more creative and learner-friendly than conventional methods of learning tenses. They also expressed positive opinions about the effectiveness of language games in providing practical learning experiences.

## Discussion

The findings highlight that integrating language games into the teaching of tenses can significantly enhance grammatical accuracy and learner engagement among teacher trainees. The experimental group's higher test scores and positive feedback demonstrate the potential of this approach in transforming grammar lessons into active, student-centered learning experiences. Language games provide real-life situations for active learning. The responses of the questionnaire showed that interactive language games improved learner engagement, confidence, motivation, and collaboration while reducing anxiety, supporting the observed progress in tense mastery.

This aligns with pedagogical theories advocating for experiential learning and further supports the need for innovative methods in English as a second language education. In educational reforms and curriculum development for English language teaching, it is important to integrate interactive and communicative learner-centered teaching strategies to enhance English as a second language learning in Sri Lanka.

## Conclusion

This research confirms that game-based learning strategies, when integrated into tense instruction, positively influence the mastery of English tenses among teacher trainees. The approach not only improved test performance but also cultivated a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment. The results of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating how language games improve ESL teacher trainees' mastery of tense forms, promoting active involvement, reducing anxiety, and refining grammar learning outcomes in the field of ESL teacher education. These results suggest that incorporating such methods into teacher training curricula could enhance future language teaching. These findings further highlight the value of rethinking conventional grammar teaching in the National Colleges of Education and other higher education institutions. Future research is recommended to examine long-term impacts, scalability of such interventions, and their integration into formal curriculum planning.

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