

MODERN TEACHING METHODS FOR ESL STUDENTS

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Abstract: We're casting our vote for "yes," and we're done listening to naysayers. It may just be the best mix since peanut butter and chocolate. Grammar is usually thought of as dry and dull. Plenty of old-school ESL teachers will tell you that traditional rote learning methods are the way to go.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Use Grammar Games in the ESL Classroom?

Studies show that rote memorization isn't necessarily the way to go when it comes to learning grammar. Every day, the ESL teaching community comes closer to the realization that there are more effective and fun ways to teach grammar.

One of these is games.

ESL classroom games aren't just for fun.

Games and fun activities for teaching grammar can have purpose if used correctly and at the right time¹.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Just take a look at some of the benefit a well-timed grammar game can offer any ESL classroom:

- **Games shake things up.**

When language learners can apply grammar and use it in a fun way, there's a better chance that they'll retain it all. They'll be able to practice and internalize grammar phenomena extensively rather than just learning a bunch of rules superficially.

When language learners are exposed to repeated target grammar through different and varied activities, they'll be more motivated to work and retain the grammar as much as possible. They know that games are coming up, and they need to be prepared if they want to win!

Think about this compared to boring old grammar lectures about the differences between the present simple and the present continuous. Sure, you'll still need lessons, but the enthusiasm your students have for games and being classroom champions will carry them through².

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- **Help students develop a competitive streak.**

Grammar games for learning English don't only motivate, they also boost the idea of competition in the ESL classroom. Like they say, a bit of healthy competition never hurt anyone. Students will strive to be their very best when thrown into action, and they'll need to outperform their peers and surpass their own expectations.

- **Encourage cooperative learning.**

We just said that games make students competitive, so how can they also help with cooperation? They facilitate bonding between students and between the students and teacher. Students need to assist their classmates and cheer them on when competing in teams or pairs. Everyone will pitch into the group effort in order to succeed!

- **Get students' pent-up energy out.**

¹ Boocock, S.S., & Schild, E.O. (2018) (eds.). *Simulation Games in Learning*. London: Sage Publications

² Bredemeier, M.E., & Greenblat, C.S. (2011). The educational effectiveness of simulation games: A synthesis of findings. *Simulation & Games*, 12 (3), 307-331.

ESL learners often lose focus during traditional grammar lessons because there's a lot of new and sometimes complex information to absorb. Introducing a well-timed game to teach grammar could break up a monotonous lesson and get rambunctious learners to participate.

Who Wants to Play ESL Grammar Games?

Games for any age group are fine. They aren't only meant for young children.

Contrary to popular belief, adults love games as much as kids.

They may appear more reluctant at first, but that's because they're not used to this way of learning. Once they see you, the ESL teacher, having a great time and being a little bit silly, they won't be so reserved.

Here are the reasons why different groups of ESL students can expect to see unique benefits from mixing games and grammar:

- **Adults need more engaging ways to learn.**

Generally speaking, adult language learners have a more difficult time learning another language. Language and grammar games will help them learn the relevant points in context.

- **All students need to keep things fresh.**

Learning grammar or any part of language is tiring. The constant learning of grammar rules and exceptions in English requires constant effort from learners. Grammar games, if used wisely, can really break up the monotony of what's considered to be one of the worst and more difficult aspects of learning any language. In short, using grammar games in the ESL classroom can allow for meaningful use of the target language in the right context.

- **Younger learners need a purpose to study.**

Many young ESL students just fail to see the importance or need to learn and study grammar. To them, grammar is just something their teachers make them study. They're too young to really grasp the true concept of the importance of grammar, which is why game playing and grammar go hand-in-hand sometimes—these young learners will have no idea that they're actually learning something very valuable that will assist them with their English knowledge in the future³.

- **Games target young students' learning potential.**

Grammar games will naturally pique a child's curiosity. They'll want to explore and experiment with different skills. When young children can move around, they'll be able to better stimulate their mental capacity. Once this has been stimulated, they'll not only learn, but they'll also retain the new information as well.

So, keeping all of the above in mind, what kind of grammar games work best when teaching ESL?

How to Choose the Right ESL Grammar Games

It's important to recognize the purpose of a grammar game in your ESL lesson.

By no means whatsoever should you use it as just another "time filler."

Yes, perhaps these particular games are funny and entertaining for your learners, but that's not the point of using games in the classroom.

The point is to learn and to take something away from the session. Think of games like interactive lessons.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, every learner of English (or any other language) wants to have a fun language learning experience.

Many learners dread grammar and just the mention of the irregular past participles and passive voice may be enough to make them run and hide. Like in any type of ESL learning situation, things need to be changed up a bit and games can definitely be overused. Use them sparingly and at the right times to either introduce a point or to reinforce, but not for both.

³ Dorn, D.S. (1989). Simulation games: One more tool on the pedagogical shelf. *Teaching Sociology* 17, 1- 18.

If you've been against using games to teach ESL grammar, you ought to give it a shot. You'll not only motivate them, but you'll also encourage your learners to use English more authentically.

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