

Application of Communicative Game-based Learning Project “Aengime” for Teaching Grammar EFL Classrooms

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Abstract: A persistent issue exists in Kazakh higher education institutions regarding the non-systematic approach to teaching grammar. Although some believe that grammar is acquired automatically, thus requiring no separate study, this sentiment may not be entirely accurate. Knowledge may sometimes be presented in an unsystematic manner, lacking structure and clarity. Therefore, students may struggle to comprehend and apply the language’s logic effectively. Gamification is suggested as an entertaining and engaging approach to facilitate learning EFL and bridge students’ attainments and practice of grammatical subjects. This study investigates a practical solution to that problem by introducing a blended game-based learning project called “Aengime,” including board games, cards, and digital games. A qualitative research design was adopted, and the participants comprised three female TEFL teachers and 15 student teachers of science education. The data were collected via literature review, in-class observations, and a focus group interview. The results revealed that game-based activities were communicative in developing students’ English skills, and the games positively impacted their self-confidence in speaking English. Also, results showed that incorporating games and playful elements facilitated a positive experience.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Dilbilgisi öğretimi
İletişimsel
Oyun tabanlı
Proje

İngilizce Dilbilgisi Sınıflarında Dilbilgisi Öğretimi için İletişimsel Oyun Tabanlı Öğrenme Projesi “Aengime”nin Uygulanması

Özet: Kazak yüksek öğretim kurumlarında, dil bilgisi öğretiminde sistematik olmayan yaklaşımla ilgili kalıcı bir sorun mevcuttur. Bazıları dilbilgisinin otomatik olarak edinildiğine, dolayısıyla ayrı bir çalışma gerektirmediğine inansa da bu görüşün doğruluğu görecelidir. Bilgi bazen sistematik olmayan, yapıdan ve netlikten yoksun bir şekilde sunulabilir. Bu nedenle öğrenciler dilin mantığını etkili bir şekilde kavramak ve uygulamakta zorluk yaşayabilirler. Oyunlaştırma, Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenimini kolaylaştırmak ve öğrencilerin gramer konularındaki kazanımları ile uygulamaları arasında köprü kurmak için eğlenceli ve ilgi çekici bir yaklaşım olarak önerilmiştir. Bu çalışma, masa oyunları, kartlar ve dijital oyunları içeren “Aengime” adlı karma oyun tabanlı bir öğrenme projesini tanıtarak bu soruna pratik bir çözüm aramaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma tasarımı benimsenmiş ve katılımcılar üç kadın TEFL öğretmeni ve 15 fen bilgisi eğitimi öğretmen adayından oluşmuştur. Veriler literatür taraması, sınıf içi gözlemler ve odak grup görüşmesi yoluyla toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar, oyun temelli etkinliklerin öğrencilerin İngilizce becerilerini geliştirmede iletişimsel olduğunu ve oyunların öğrencilerin İngilizce konuşma konusundaki özgüvenlerini olumlu yönde etkilediğini ortaya çıkardı. Ayrıca sonuçlar, oyunların ve eğlenceli unsurların birleştirilmesinin olumlu bir deneyimi kolaylaştırdığını gösterdi.

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1. Introduction

Educators employ games to encourage students to apply the target language in all domains—speaking, reading, writing, listening, and grammar. Alfadil (2020) reports that throughout the past 20 years, GBL has become more widely used in various fields, including language learning. Game-Based Learning (GBL) is a technique for improving students’ abilities and knowledge using games in a digital or non-digital learning environment (Wang & Zheng, 2021). Furthermore, the research by Niemelä *et al.* (2020) suggests that serious games might successfully enhance language learners’ writing abilities. Digital role-playing games have been shown to improve students’ grammatical abilities by Rojas and Villafuerte (2018), while table games have been the subject of much recent research (Güneş & Taş, 2023; Tsai *et al.*, 2019). Instructional games have been created quickly to be used in various learning environments. Hsu (2017), for instance, investigated using augmented reality and virtual reality to teach English.

This study has highlighted the efficacy of game-based learning in enhancing language proficiency amongst learners since it can enhance students’ understanding engagingly. It is important to remember that learning may be quite draining. According to Cheng and Chen (2019), students may find learning a second or foreign language overwhelming. Wu *et al.* (2014) found that two things harm language learners’ outcomes: inadequate learning environments and motivation. Thus, it is essential to design engaging learning spaces that meet the requirements of language learners (Chen & Hsu, 2020). In his research, Sung (2017) emphasized the value of using a game-based learning technique to increase students’ enthusiasm to study. It is also assumed that playing games aid pupils in reviewing language usage in addition to practicing it. According to Wang (2010, p. 130), games that serve as communicative activities create a framework in which students practice the target language for information exchange, meaning negotiation, and meaningful engagement with others. In this sense, we can state that games are readily included in lessons whenever needed and suitable. For instance, games may be utilized as warm-up exercises, to teach new language structures, to review previously covered language themes, or even as lesson follow-up exercises. This tool greatly aids students’ learning, helping them efficiently practice new grammatical structures in the classroom or memorize new terms.

Lastly, games and game-like activities foster the development of students’ interpersonal relationships. Teachers in Kazakhstan use TEFL. Considering that, except for a few institutions, English is neither a native nor a second language, it is not the language of government or education instruction, as the centralised government decides curricula in the Kazak higher education system (Zorba *et al.*, 2021). The study of English by non-native speakers in nations where English is not the official language is referred to as English as a foreign language (EFL). This should not be confused with the process of studying English in a nation where the majority language is English, known as English as a second language or an additional language (Nordquist, 2020).

In order to integrate into the modern world, Kazakhstan teachers apply communicative language teaching (CLT) as a contemporary approach to education, emphasizing the importance of communicative skills. Introduced in the 1970s, it gained global recognition due to the growing need for language learners to acquire practical communication skills. Nevertheless, despite its extensive adoption, significant concerns remain regarding the discrepancy between this method and traditional teaching practices. It is widely acknowledged that Nunan (1991) played a pivotal role in disseminating communicative language teaching (CLT) in the present era. He emphasizes

acquiring communication skills through interactions with authentic materials and personal experiences and integrating classroom learning with real-world contexts. His pedagogical approaches to teaching English have been subjected to extensive empirical investigation and have been widely adopted by educators around the globe. Nunan (1991) provides a comprehensive account of role-plays, surveys, interviews, and games to enhance language learning, aiming to accelerate the process and enhance the enjoyment of the learning experience.

During the 1980s and 1990s, numerous CLT-trained English instructors from the UK and North America who were teaching abroad introduced the communicative/interactive approach across various educational levels in different countries. Some countries incorporated this approach into national education policies to improve English teaching methods and develop students’ communicative skills rather than solely aiming to pass examinations. As Irgaliyeva and Bantel (2020) observe, this shift in language use has become a focal point in Central Asian TESOL meetings and has been the subject of numerous academic articles in Kazakhstan. Despite the acknowledged effectiveness of CLT, practical challenges such as large class sizes, students’ low proficiency, and exam-oriented preparation hinder the method’s widespread adoption. A significant proportion of the population lacks exposure to the natural language environment. This is why teaching grammar to language learners is an ongoing debate among stakeholders, including English language tutors and learners, researchers, and practitioners (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023; La Dunifa, 2023). Some scholars maintain that grammar does not require special attention in language acquisition.

As Lewis (1993) asserts, grammar is not the foundational aspect of language acquisition. Furthermore, current linguistic research overwhelmingly disproves any opposing viewpoint. As Chomsky (1957) asserted, linguistic elements such as lexis, syntax, phonology, and morphology are of paramount importance in language acquisition. Nevertheless, effective language use necessitates that learners master grammar skills, facilitating the organization of words and messages. Richards and Renandya (2002) point out that “without good grammar skills, learners’ language development will be severely constrained.” This emphasizes the significance of grasping the fundamental prerequisites of language grammar. Such knowledge is essential for accurately communicating ideas and messages (Celik & Kara, 2024). Azar (2007) underscored the significance of grammar instruction, positing that it facilitates students’ comprehension of language and their capacity to communicate effectively in various contexts. Furthermore, Azar (2007) posited that without grammatical knowledge, learners are left with a disjointed understanding of language, comprising only isolated sounds and words—solely using expressions and images to convey meaning. EFL learners cannot communicate effectively without mastering grammar, mainly when speaking correctly.

Consequently, we are firmly convinced that enhancing grammatical abilities is contingent upon cultivating communicative competencies as a foundational principle. Subsequently, learners are encouraged to expand their vocabulary using supplementary resources and apply this knowledge in collaborative settings. Some critics of the communicative method argue that it does not place sufficient emphasis on grammar rules, which they claim renders the method incapable of effectively teaching grammatical competence. However, this is a misconception perpetuated by those lacking the requisite qualifications and comprehensive training in lesson planning. It is a fallacy to suggest that the communicative method does not emphasize teaching grammar sufficiently. By following the prescribed steps of a lesson planning framework, such as presentation-practice-production, it is possible to integrate a grammar lesson with a speaking lesson enjoyably and engagingly.

Consequently, the communicative approach represents a creative yet structured methodology for teaching English. Indeed, most English-language textbooks adhere to the conventional PPP lesson planning framework. However, a significant drawback of these books is that they are often outdated and lack engaging content. This methodology was deemed the most suitable for developing the communicative game-based learning project, “Aengime,” due to its underlying principles and key features. Following the third principle of the communicative approach, communicative activities are of paramount importance. Activities must be presented in a context and have a communicative purpose. Typical activities include games, problem-solving tasks, and role-play. The activities must involve an information gap, a choice, and feedback. The GBL project “Aengime,” tasks are presented as board games, flashcards, and multimedia games such as Quizlet and WebQuests.

The communicative method posits that motivation is a fundamental aspect of the learning process. It is recommended that teachers initiate interest in the subject matter from the outset of the lesson. The Gamification Method is following this principle, as evidenced by the work of Park *et al.* (2019) and Chen (2005). Game-based learning can potentially enhance students’ learning effectiveness and motivation (Park *et al.*, 2019). Chen (2005) posits that games motivate students and provide a fun, relaxing learning atmosphere. Furthermore, using games allows students to utilise language in a non-stressful manner, focusing on both the message and the language. This study explored students’ perceptions of grammar instruction after implementing game-based grammar activities. Also, the communicative method posits that trial and error is an integral aspect of the learning process. Consequently, games can facilitate a supportive learning environment characterized by enjoyment and excitement. Following Wang (2010), educators encourage learners to engage in communicative interactions in the target language rather than correcting errors in game-based contexts. This could facilitate language acquisition more naturally and practically, as games can reduce the fear of making mistakes. Conversely, many students feel disengaged and at ease with the traditional teaching approach. In a non-stressful learning environment, students are optimistic and confident in their ability to work with others to learn a new language in an uninhibited manner. For example, in the “Aengime” project, participants are grouped in teams of up to eight individuals.

The reduction in anxiety levels is attributed to the collaborative nature of the learning environment, in which students work alongside their peers, and the teacher assumes a facilitator and instructor role. Peer correction is initially employed, followed by monitoring of the work. After the game, the teacher may then make corrections. Consequently, students will be more active in their engagement with the curriculum. Subsequently, one of the principal tenets of the communicative method is contextualization. Following the communicative method, teachers will present a grammar topic in a meaningful context. To illustrate, when teachers scan the QR code for the “Aengime” project, they are presented with a visual timeline and sentences accompanied by examples of the contexts in which this tense can be used. This approach enables teachers to streamline the explanation of complex rules, reducing the time required for this learning process.

Using authentic materials is crucial for students to develop their grammar and supplement the often-dull textbooks. To illustrate, the flashcards provided with the board game “Aengime” present questions relevant to real-world scenarios and oriented toward practical applications. For instance, the flashcards ask, “Where did you go last holiday?” in the past simple tense and inquire about current projects. What is the nature of this phenomenon? Concerning the present

continuous tense, the question might be posed as follows: “Have your goals changed since you became older?” regarding the past perfect tense.

In the context of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, where EFL instruction is pivotal, a persistent issue exists regarding the deductive and non-systematic approach to teaching grammar (Muratbekovna, 2024; Yermekova et al., 2024). The communicative teaching method has raised concerns about students’ inability to comprehend and apply the language’s logic effectively. This is a common issue faced by many educators today. Additionally, faculty members face challenges in explaining grammar concepts, further complicating the situation. Besides, some teachers still use the grammar-translation method (GTM), which students often find boring (Zorba & Cakir, 2019), and they cannot adapt this knowledge to real-life situations (Rasch, 2016). Consequently, a significant proportion of EFL learners can identify and apply grammatical rules, yet they cannot communicate effectively in the target language. In response to these challenges, there is a growing interest in integrating gamification into EFL classrooms, focusing on grammar instruction.

The study’s objective is to present an alternative solution in the form of a systematic overview of the “Aengime” grammar project, which employs a game-based approach. Therefore, the study also aims to investigate the faculty members’ perceptions of the effectiveness of communicative game-based learning, such as the “Aengime” platform, in improving motivation to engage actively in the educational process. Learners’ perceptions significantly affect the teaching and learning processes; thus, investigating them can provide teachers with essential and valuable information to consider and improve in any pedagogical intervention. Due to the problem of unsystematic grammar learning and a lack of motivation to study, the authors reviewed the international experience of gamification methods as one of the most efficient solutions and developed their own communicative game-based learning project, “Aengime,” to help students enhance their grammar skills through interaction in groups during the production part of the lesson.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study was based on the qualitative research method based on observations and a focus group interview. Qualitative research draws from interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, seeking to deeply understand a research subject rather than predict outcomes, as in the positivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted with randomly selected three female TEFL teachers who utilized this game-based project (Table 1) and 15 STEM faculty of 1-year pre-service biology teachers (nine females and six males) in one of the Astana Universities (Table 2).

Table 1.

TEFL teachers’ biographic information

Participant Teachers	Qualification	University-level teaching experience	Research area	Subject teaching
Madina	PhD	18 years	Applied Linguistics	General English
Nurgul	Master	15 years	Assessment at schools	
Roza	Master	3 years	Methodology of TEFL	

Table 2.
1-year Pre-STEM teachers' biographic information

Participant Students	Age	Learning English Experience	Level of English	Participant Students	Age	Learning English Experience	Level of English
Dinara	18	Eight years	A2	Aibek	18	Six years	A1
Tomiris	17	Six years	A1	Aidana	17	Seven years	A1
Aliya	18	Eight years	A2	Nurlan	18	Eight years	B1
Yeskendir	18	Seven years	A1	Aidos	19	Seven years	A2
Aigul	19	Eight years	B1	Alexandra	18	Six years	A2
Diana	18	Six years	A2	Alibek	19	Seven years	A2
Arsen	19	Nine years	B1	Aizhan	19	Seven years	B1
Nazerke	19	Eight years	B1				

2.3. Data collection

The researcher collected the data by reviewing related literature and taking observation notes in the General English classes the participating students attended once a week for three academic hours. In addition, the data about the implementations were obtained via a focus group interview with the participating teachers.

2.4. Procedure

The interviews were fully recorded and transcribed. Participants were given the choice to complete the answers to the questions during the interview in either Kazakh or Russian. Participants were asked open-ended questions for this research to gather their opinions on grammar lessons after implementing a game-based grammar project. Transcribed interview data were analyzed using content analysis to classify, summarize, and tabulate. Direct quotations were used from interviewees, and the consistency of opinions was analyzed for inner reliability. To uphold the study's trustworthiness, the researcher performed a member-checking process after interpreting the data. The findings were disclosed to the participants, allowing them to engage in further discussion and provide their own perspectives to enhance the interpretation of the research question. During the interview, many students mentioned that they are not clearly aware of the importance of studying English; therefore, they think it is not as stimulating as other subjects. In addition, they have been studying English for seven to eight years, but their English proficiency is inadequate. It ranges from A1-B1 levels and requires a differentiated approach to teaching. Classes are given only once a week and after a week, which may negatively reflect the memorization of the material. Moreover, they mentioned that materials were given mostly using online books with low-motivational context that negatively influenced language comprehension. In the process of the development of the project “Aengime”, we decided to use an unconventional approach as a method of teaching foreign languages - communicative game-based learning. The teacher may use a presentation of grammar explanation with timelines and examples by scanning the QR code on the surface game board.

We applied six games based on three game-based grammar activities and used them in this study: Guessing the Word, Board and Dice Game, and WebQuest. The first two games were designed to train A1-A2 to level the topics, the present simple, modal verbs (e.g., can/cannot), and the verb to be with the personality description. Games 3-6 were designed to train A2-B1 levels on the topic of conditional sentences and grammar tenses. The following information explains the mechanism of their work:

2.5. The Games

2.5.1. *Guessing the word*

“Guessing the Word” is a play that helps to train Present Simple Tense. This game combines training grammar with training lexis about personality, character, appearance, nationality, and profession. Also, there is a set of cards with photos of distinguished representatives of different professions and countries. Even if a student does not know about this person, it is a great chance to broaden his/her cultural knowledge about famous people worldwide and Kazakhstan. This game is based on the principle of co-study of language and culture; it means that teaching languages forms an attitude towards language not only as a means of intercultural communication but also as a social value, as a reflection of the national and cultural heritage, an instrument of cognition of the surrounding reality (Zhoralbekova & Tleuzhanova, 2021).

There are two ways of doing this activity. This game aims to guess a word through definition without naming it. First, divide students into groups. Each group chooses a representative to take a category to play. She/he writes down five words related to the category chosen. The other members of the group guess those words within a limited time. The group that can guess the most correct answers within the shortest time will win. The other method is assigning students into groups, and each group sits in a circle. Each group member will be given a card containing words or names of people to guess but not allowed to see it. The other group members will be clue-givers for the words. The winner is the person who can guess the most correct answers within the given time. This activity can be followed up with individual work of writing a short paragraph describing a person using the words and sharing his/her work with other group members who should give feedback on their friends' works.

2.5.2. *Board and Dice Game*

The purpose of the board and dice game is to help students practice spoken English and grammar through a fun competition in groups during the production part of the lesson. Each board has a set of flashcards that suit the steps on the board by color. Students sit in groups of a maximum of eight people. Each group member takes turns throwing the dice and moves his/her token as many steps as that appears on the dice but can only stay there if answering the question or doing the instruction on the card correctly. The winner is the first who can reach the finish line. This activity can be done with grammar topics such as tenses, and Conditional Sentences. For example, a student takes a card. There is a formula with a particular tense on the one side of the card. There is a question using this tense on the other side of the card. The student should reply to this question in the suitable tense and only after moving on. A teacher may ask a follow-up question: “Why do you think so?” “Could you provide examples?” for in-depth answers and let a student express himself more. As an additional task, students at the end of the game may retell the information about their groupmates and repeat grammar rules and their speech using the third form of “he” or “she.”

2.5.3. *Quizlet*

Quizlet is a pedagogical play that uses flashcards to memorize new words online. It is a free online application for learning vocabulary, available on the internet and mobile devices. It includes vocabulary learning sites and apps. In addition, according to Rejeki *et al.* (2020), Quizlet is also an online tool for creating and learning with flashcards that can be used on computers. The app offers various modes of vocabulary study, including flashcards, gravity, write, speller, match, and live. According to Sari (2019), Quizlet's primary function is to enhance students' language skills. This online service aims to assist students in quickly memorizing a large number

of new foreign words through visual and auditory means. Quizlet’s study and play features offer diverse digital flashcards and tools that can enhance learning engagement and attractiveness, according to Sari *et al.* (2020). The study features consist of flashcards, which enable students to consolidate knowledge and revise information efficiently. This application was added as a QR code as an additional tool to listen, learn, write, spell, and test new words that were given in ‘Aengime.’”

2.5.4. *WebQwest*

Web Quest: is” An inquiry-oriented activity in which most or all of the information used by learners is drawn from the Web. Web Quests are designed to use learners’ time well, to focus on using information rather than looking for it, and to support learners’ thinking at the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.” (Dodge, 1997). Web Quest focuses on scaffold learning, which is used to provide students with links to learn authentic materials. This process motivates students to investigate and participate in groups (March, 1998). We designed a webqwest on the joyteka.com platform where students can practice grammar, which consists of five questions. While doing exercises, students have to find subjects, do some challenges, and answer grammar questions to find a way out of the quest room at the end. It is a fun and entertaining task that is additionally used as a warm-up.

3. Findings

The findings of the study are presented below, referring to each related research question.

3.1. Students’ Perception of Grammar Learning

Most participants wrote negative comments responding to the first question (What do you think of grammar classes?). Out of the 15 statements in the responses, 11 pointed out that grammar lessons were challenging to learn and they did not use it in real life, 12 indicated that there were too many rules to memorize and exercise to do in grammar class, and 13 showed that grammar class was either boring or frightening.

3.1.1. *Question 1: “What do you think of your grammar teaching classes?”*

Two additional participants provided neutral feedback regarding the grammar lesson without expressing any explicit approval.

Aliya: I don’t like grammar because it feels like I can only pass the test after, but I can’t apply this knowledge in real life.

Yeskendir: I think learning grammar is so boring. The teacher explains the rules, and we just do exercises.

Aidos: I think grammar is the most confusing and hardest part of English learning. I spend so much time doing home tasks that I still feel inadequate.

3.1.2. *Question 2: What problems do you usually face while learning English grammar?*

Thirteen students expressed fear of making errors while speaking after learning grammar; that is why they are reluctant to practice speaking because errors make them feel unconfident.

Alexandra: I am able to converse in English comfortably with my friends; however, I tend to avoid speaking with my teacher or in a big group due to my unease about making grammatical errors in their presence.

Twelve students expressed that they do not feel confident enough while speaking because they do not know all grammar rules systematically.

Aizhan: I have been learning English for a long time; however, I don't understand the connection between grammar rules because they are given chaotically, so I speak instinctively and am not totally sure if I speak correctly.

However, the data analysis after using GBL “Aengime” revealed a totally different result. All students (n=15) gave positive responses to the question:

3.1.3. Question 3: What is your perception of using GBL “Aengime” in learning English grammar?

Dinara: I got very bright emotions. Before, I already had some knowledge of grammar, but I didn't know how to apply it. Working in groups during the game and extra online games helped me to become more confident and positively change my opinion about grammar.

Tomiris: Very interesting game that helps train my grammar and vocabulary so easily and quickly. I liked that we could repeat words before working in groups. I revised how to pronounce words in Quizlet first; then I felt more confident that I pronounced everything right. I remember we did lots of written exercises after learning new grammar and barely spoke afterwards. Here, I could start speaking immediately, even if I didn't learn much about the new rule.

Aliya: I liked learning grammar through the questions in board games; visual cards were especially helpful in revising what the tense formula looked like. So, I replied to all questions and feel that I improved my grammar, listening, and speaking when communicating with my group mates.

Alibek: I'm much more motivated now. I used to feel a bit disconnected from grammar lessons, but with “Aengime,” I look forward to coming to class. It's engaging, and I find myself more immersed in the learning process. That's a big change for me.

What is expected in these responses is that according to the students, grammar class was really inspiring, and the game-based activities made grammar class more positive and supportive:

Arsen: I have to say, I find it quite effective. Unlike traditional grammar lessons, the games make learning feel like a fun activity rather than a chore. I think that shift in mindset has significantly impacted my learning experience. Working in a team helped me avoid some mistakes, and positive feedback from the groupmates approved that I'm on the right track.

Diana: I improved my grammar skills and was surprised to find out more information about our local heroes of the war, writers and singers. For me, grammar tenses were very close to learning math before, with all of these different formulas. However, “Aengime” game helped to systemize my knowledge, and giving hints with grammar formulas on the card helped me construct sentences faster.

3.1.4. Question 4: How does the usage of GBL “Aengime” influence your studying?

The findings indicated that 14 responded affirmatively to the fourth question. The students cited several justifications for demonstrating how learning enhanced their grammar abilities. The most commonly cited reason, with 14 participants, is that learning grammar offers ample opportunities to practice speaking skills, leading to greater confidence when communicating in English. Several participants expressed their views as follows:

Aidana: I'm much more motivated now. I used to feel a bit disconnected from grammar lessons, but with “Aengime,” I look forward to coming to class. It's engaging, and I find myself more immersed in the learning process. That's a big change for me.

Nurlan: One noticeable impact is on my speaking ability. In the games, we have to communicate and collaborate, which means we constantly use English to express ourselves. It's like a practical language workout, and I've noticed that my speaking confidence has improved.

Only one participant responded ‘no’ to the fourth question. S/he pointed out that learning grammar through games was hard because there was insufficient time for improvisation. She/he wanted to add more answers but did not want other people to wait.

3.2. Faculty Members Perception of Utility and Pedagogical Value of Communicative Game-based Learning “Aengime”

Interviews with faculty members revealed positive feedback after utilizing communicative game-based “Aengime” with students. Teachers wanted to add these games into the university curriculum as an unordinary students-oriented teaching method. They emphasized a motivating effect on students when they have a healthy, competent spirit and collaborate in mini-groups. Moreover, it was pointed out that games may develop not only grammar and speaking but all language skills.

3.2.1. Question 1: How did the project “Aengime” assist you in improving teaching English?

Madina: I find “Aengime” to be a valuable addition to our teaching methodology. It offers a fresh perspective on language instruction. Unlike traditional methods, it engages students actively and encourages them to participate.

Nurgul: Several aspects stand out. Firstly, the competitive element in the games fosters a healthy sense of challenge and encourages students to apply what they've learned. Secondly, the games promote collaboration, which is crucial for language development. Students have to communicate with each other, which mirrors real-life language use. Finally, the games cover a range of language skills – speaking, listening, reading, and writing – making them comprehensive language-learning tools.

3.2.2. Question 2: Did applying the “Aengime” project improve students' grammar and learning motivation?

Roza: ‘When students are engaged and motivated, they tend to learn more effectively. “Aengime” creates an environment where learning is fun and interactive. Students are not just passive recipients of information; they become active participants in their own learning. This, in turn, enhances their understanding and retention of grammatical rules and language concepts.

3.2.3. Question 3: What suggestions could you provide to improve this project?

Madina: Games are wonderful because they have real-life questions, and students may use their knowledge in practice. I would just love to prolong teaching using these games during 2-3 lessons when vocabulary words are given in advance or as a home assignment.

4. Discussion

After implementing game-based activities in grammar class, the data analysis demonstrated a positive perception of grammar learning. This section will elaborate on three distinctions.

Firstly, students’ previously negative attitudes towards learning grammar, which they considered difficult and tedious, have significantly shifted towards positive perceptions, now seeing grammar as an engaging and pleasurable subject to study. The research findings may be used to inform school policies on the importance of using alternative methods of TEFL, adding this project to a school and university curriculum. Also, it is recommended that bottom-up teacher-initiated collaborative practices be enhanced by encouraging and providing teachers with opportunities for self-learning, professional development, and empowerment of their leadership skills.

The majority of students reported that grammar was dull, unvarying, and lacked enjoyable aspects. These critical attitudes align with earlier research examining students’ grammar education judgments (Rasch, 2016). These studies have revealed that while most students agreed that grammar was essential in learning English, they reported negative attitudes toward the subject. Moreover, they also considered grammar challenging to learn, as they needed to memorize and apply rules. Students found the content of the subject difficult to grasp. Similarly to mathematics, where errors are unacceptable, students must commit the formulas to memory, much like in other ‘hard science’ subjects. It is connected with the fact that teachers still use the grammar-translation method (GTM), through which teachers explain the grammar deductively, where rules are followed with the instruction, and students do the exercises in accordance with grammar.

The most popular method in foreign language teaching is the communicative method. The communicative GBL project “Aengime” was also based on it. This method aims to develop the ability to think in the target language within real-life situations. The teacher models communication scenarios throughout the lesson. The program motivates students to engage actively. As a result, they are encouraged to communicate their thoughts effectively, enabling peer-to-peer communication beyond teacher-student exchanges. Game situations, collaborative work, and error correction exercises significantly influence the communicative approach to foreign language teaching. The communicative approach to language learning prioritizes the acquisition of vocabulary and analytical skills. This approach posits that successful foreign language acquisition requires familiarity with linguistic forms, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and proficiency in their practical application for communication purposes. Due to a lack of expert knowledge, grammar may be either given again deductively, or some hold the belief that grammar will be acquired automatically, thus requiring no separate study; this sentiment is not entirely accurate. Knowledge is often presented in an unsystematic manner, lacking structure and clarity. This is a common issue faced by many educators today. Consequently, students may struggle to comprehend and apply the language’s logic effectively. In addition, teachers sometimes overlook student errors, further hindering their learning experience.

Secondly, a grammar class incorporating game-based activities effectively altered students’ perception of the significance of learning grammar to enhance all four language abilities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Data revealed that most students believed that improving grammatical ability is crucial for enhancing English proficiency, as grammar is an integral component that cannot be isolated from the four language skills. It can be approved by Canale and Swain, who claim that the communication process necessitates a framework or structure, namely grammar, representing shared conventions about language functioning. Additionally, effective communication relies on mutual cooperation among participants to negotiate and establish meaning. In their extensively researched and influential paper outlining aspects of communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) did not diminish the

significance of grammar. Instead, they aimed to contextualize grammatical proficiency within a more expansive and comprehensive understanding of communicative competence.

In conclusion, students perceived game-based activities as a means to acquire more communicative English skills. The findings imply that these activities led to an increase in their skill set. Students reported increased confidence in language use after participating in a game-based learning environment. This corresponds with findings from Laurian-Fitzgerald (2015), indicating that games significantly impact motivating self-confidence. Participants in her study reported increased confidence in their speaking abilities and greater comfort in expressing themselves within a welcoming, interactive setting. The incorporation of games and playful elements facilitated this positive experience.

5. Conclusions

This study was conducted as a communicative game-based language learning project called “Aengime.” The research aims to investigate if game-based language activities can modify students’ negative attitudes towards EFL acquisition, with a focus on grammar learning. The data suggests a significant change in students’ attitudes. Limitations arose due to past and present experiences of learning grammar. These activities are innovative in grammar classes, and their potential to change students’ negative attitudes toward grammar learning and receive favorable feedback from faculty members can be considered positive conclusions. Additionally, undertaking a comprehensive study on the influence of game-based activities on students’ viewpoints towards grammar learning and the efficacy of these activities in improving language proficiency was quite productive. Future studies could engage educators for a more comprehensive understanding of the effect of grammar-based games on learners’ attitudes toward grammar instruction. The project “Aengime” is registered as a “know-how” by Kazakhstan’s patent department and is considered intellectual property. In short, we can characterize this project as the quintessence of the communicative method, game-based learning, and digital tools. Focusing on implicitly developing grammar, we teach students to speak, listen, read, write, and translate. The research findings may be used to inform school policies on the importance of using alternative methods of TEFL, adding this project to a school and university curriculum. Also, it is recommended that bottom-up teacher-initiated collaborative practices be enhanced by encouraging and providing teachers with opportunities for self-learning, professional development, and empowerment of their leadership skills.

Ethical Issues

This paper is based on the first author’s doctoral dissertation titled ‘Application of the Task-Based Language Assessment in the Blended EFL Learning Environment’ supervised by the second author at the Graduate School of Educational Sciences, Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey. Regarding the ethical considerations of the research, an informed consent letter was distributed to all participants before their involvement. The consent form was formulated to furnish participants with adequate information about the study, an understanding of the research aims, and to ensure voluntary participation. Matters concerning anonymity and confidentiality were also addressed and explained to the participants.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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