

## Discovering Students' Preference for Grammar Learning Activities Outside the Classroom

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Received: 25 Feb 2018. Accepted: 19 Apr 2018/Published online: 30 Nov 2018  
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### ABSTRACT

*Learning grammar is crucial to improve students' linguistic competence. However, face-to-face time is limited for engaging students in learning grammar in the classroom. Therefore, students are normally encouraged to participate in grammar learning activities outside the classroom. This paper examines types of grammar learning activities that students prefer to do outside the classroom, types of grammar learning activities that students have done voluntarily for practicing grammar outside the classroom, and whether online grammar games on the Internet is easy to obtain and suitable for the students' course. The sample of the study was 110 pre-degree students aged 18 years old. The data gathered by using a questionnaire and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel 2013.*

**Keywords:** Grammar. Outside the classroom. Digital. Online. Instructional games.

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning grammar is the most the most challenging and strenuous part in learning a language (Jalali & Dousti, 2012). However, acquiring grammar is crucial for improving their linguistic competence (Yule, 2010). Thus, instructors need to allocate sufficient time to teach grammar in class and provide students with sufficient grammar practice in order to ensure that they master grammar skills. Unfortunately, the teaching of grammar is time-consuming time (Ellis, 2005; Widodo, 2006; Uysal & Bardakci, 2014). Instructors may not be able to carry out sufficient grammar practice in class. As a result, students have to practice grammar outside the classroom.

There are several types of grammar learning activities that are accessible by students such as exercises from the textbooks, exercises from worksheets, exercises in the portable document format (pdf) that can be downloaded from the Internet, online quizzes, conventional language games and online instructional games. With regard to online instructional games, there is the most current trend to utilize them in language learning (Guillén-Nieto & Aleson-Carbonell, 2012; Juzeleniene, Mikelioniene, Escudeiro, & Carvalho, 2014; Boyle et al., 2016) have prevalently used in the teaching and learning. Prior studies indicates that ubiquitous online instructional games (Liu & Chu, 2010) and online learning activities (Zarlina, Airil Haimi, Sheema Liza, & Johana, 2012) have positive impacts on language learning. Therefore, this paper investigated on the following:

- a. What types of grammar learning activities that students prefer to do outside the classroom?
- b. What types of grammar learning activities that students have done voluntarily for practising grammar outside the classroom?
- c. Are online instructional games for grammar on the Internet easy to obtain and suitable for the students' course?

The study had several limitations. One of the limitations is that the sample only contain a specific group of students from a specific university. Another limitation is that the sample comprised more females than males.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Grammar is the analysis of the phrases and sentences in term of their structure (Yule, 2010). Students should learn grammar in order to acquire grammatical competence. This is due to grammatical competence is part of communicative competence that may enable students to use words and structures accurately (Yule, 2010). Knowledge of grammar may help students to be aware

Mastering grammar may help students use a language accurately as they are aware of the rules that govern the language. However, the teaching of grammar is time consuming (Ellis, 2005). Teaching grammar utilizes a great deal of time (Ellis, 2005; Widodo, 2006; Uysal & Bardakci, 2014). Instructors cannot afford to allocate more class time in teaching grammar as there are other skills need to be covered (Kaur, 2014) According to Kaur (2014), although sufficient grammar practice is provided in class, students still require more grammar practice outside the classroom in order to further improve their skills.

Providing opportunity to repeat grammar practice is actually important in grasping language structure (Ellis, 2005). According to Ellis (1992), practice is essential in language learning in helping students to acquire right language habits. Ellis (1992) elaborates that practice

is desired in building up a foundation for communicative language use and as a tool for handling challenges that may occur in communicative language use.

There are several types of grammar learning activities that students can use outside the classroom. They can be divided into two categories. The first category includes the traditional practice that does not involve technology. Whereas, the second category integrates technology.

Traditional grammar practice comprises repetitive pen to paper practice. Students may utilise exercises from the textbooks, worksheets and on the internet that can be downloaded in the pdf. The approach may lead to boredom in learning. A study by Davoodi (2014) proves that students prefer Computer Assisted Language Learning programmes that incorporate the use of multimedia compared to printed materials as the learning activities involving technology is more interesting. Traditional grammar practice can also utilise conventional games such as board games, puzzles, simulations and role plays. Prior research indicates that the utilisation of board games can enhance the learning of grammar and promote learning in the fun way (Lee, 2012; Raines, 2010; Tengku Nazatul Shima & Rahmah, 2013; Tengku Nazatul Shima & Rahmah, 2012; Vaishnav, 2015).

Grammar practice that integrates technology includes online quizzes and digital instructional games that may be available online or offline. The integration of technology in developing language learning activities has enabled students to access to interesting language practice that may motivate them in learning (Luu & Nguyen, 2010). Prior studies proved that excessive repetitive online quizzes may demotivate students in learning as they felt that the learning activities were monotonous and tiresome (Thang et al., 2012; Jiang, 2012). However, numerous studies on online instructional games reveal that they are useful in making learning fun (Godwin-Jones, 2014; Ang, 2014), enhancing motivation in learning (Khonmohammad, Gorjian, & Eskandari, 2014; Anyaegbu et al., 2012; Liu & Chu, 2010; Jalali & Dousti, 2012), promoting information retention (Taheri, 2014; Aghlara & Tamjid, 2011; Smith et al., 2013), and increasing engagement (Godwin-Jones, 2014; Schaaf, 2012).

Numerous studies have attempted to explain how different types of grammar learning practice benefit students (Liu & Chu, 2010; Raines, 2010; Aghlara & Tamjid, 2011; Lee, 2012; Tengku Nazatul Shima & Rahmah, 2012; Schaaf, 2012; Anyaegbu et al., 2012; Jalali & Dousti, 2012; Tengku Nazatul Shima & Rahmah, 2013; Smith et al., 2013; Godwin-Jones, 2014; Ang, 2014; Godwin-Jones, 2014; Khonmohammad, Gorjian, & Eskandari, 2014; Taheri, 2014; Vaishnav, 2015). Therefore, this study attempts to investigate types of grammar learning practice from a different perspective which is the preferences of students on types of grammar learning activities. The results may be significant for instructors to decide which types of activities to provide, or suggest to students as practice outside the classroom. It may also facilitate the instructors to develop grammar learning practice is preferred by students.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted at Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan using pre-degree students of Diploma in Food Technology. Convenience sampling was conducted by selecting the participants based on the researcher's convenience and the availability of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire was distributed in class and the participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire with the presence of the researcher. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section contained demographic profile questions. While the second section contained 7 questions on grammar learning activities that required the participants to choose the options with the given scales: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. They were able to ask the researcher explain any questions in the questionnaire if necessary. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed by using Microsoft Office Word Excel 2013.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

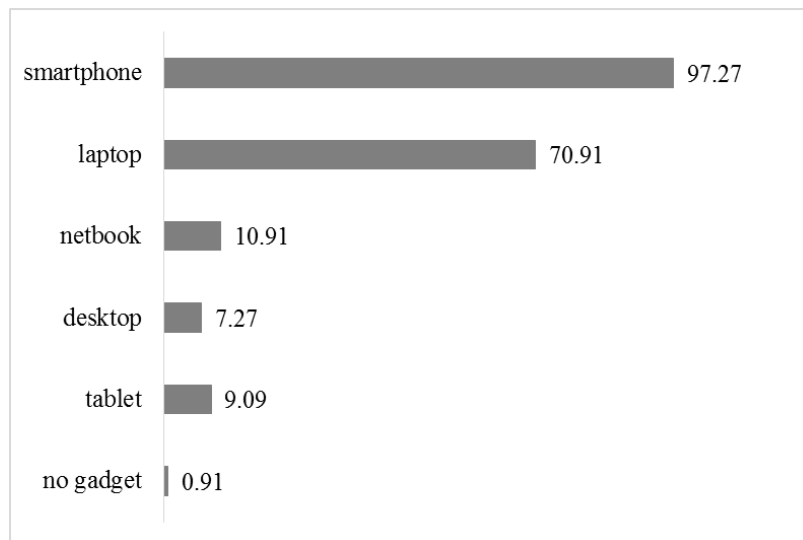
### **Reliability of the Instrument**

The reliability of the questionnaire in term of internal consistency of the scales for questions 1 to 7 was calculated by using the Cronbach's Alpha formula (Creswell, 2014). A Microsoft Excel Excel 2013 template known as Reliability Calculator was used to calculate it. The template is created by Del Siegle that was downloaded from <http://researchbasics.education.uconn.edu/excel-spreadsheet-to-calculate-instrument-reliability-estimates/>. The Cronbach Alpha value obtained for the questionnaire is 0.737. It is acceptable for the purpose of the study as the lowest suggested value is 0.70 (Clark & Creswell, 2015).

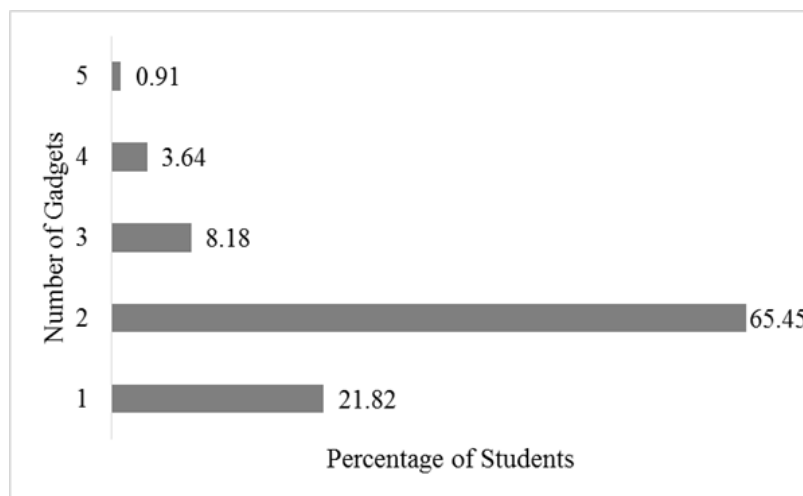
### **Demographic Profile**

The sample consisted of 110 students comprising 82.7% female and 17.3% males aged ranging from below 18 years old (4.55%), 18 years old (85.45%), 19 years old (9.08%) and 20 years old (0.91%). Majority of them were 18 years old (85.45%) as they entered the diploma programme after completing secondary schools.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 indicate types of electronic gadgets and the number of gadgets that students had. Smartphones (97.27%) was the electronic gadgets that almost all of them had. It is followed by laptops (70.91%). The electronic gadgets that were rarely used by them were netbook (10.91%), desktops (7.27%) and tablets (9.09%). Only one student (0.91%) did not have any gadgets. Two thirds of them had two gadgets (65.45%).



**Fig. 1** Types of electronic gadgets that students had



**Fig. 2** Number of gadgets students had

a) **What types of grammar learning activities that students prefer to do outside the classroom?**

**Table 1**  
 Questions on Grammar Learning Activities: Questions 1 to 5

	Question	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	SE	Confidence Level (95.0 %)
1	I prefer to do hardcopy grammar exercises outside the classroom.	3.26	3	3	0.74	0.07	0.14
2	I prefer to do pdf grammar exercises downloaded from the Internet for practising grammar outside the classroom.	3.15	3	3	0.78	0.07	0.15
3	I prefer to participate in online grammar quizzes on English teaching websites.	3.68	4	4	0.78	0.07	0.15
4	I prefer to practice grammar outside the classroom using conventional language games such as puzzles and board games.	3.95	4	4	0.75	0.07	0.14
5	I prefer to practice grammar outside the classroom using online instructional games.	3.78	4	4	0.85	0.08	0.16

Table 1 shows that conventional language games was the most preferred grammar learning activities (M=3.95, SD=0.78), followed by online instructional games (M=3.78, SD=0.85), online grammar quizzes (M=3.68, SD=0.78), and hardcopy grammar exercises (M=3.26, SD=0.74). There was a slight difference in the mean value for conventional and online language games which is only 0.17. The least preferred grammar learning activities was pdf grammar exercises downloaded from the Internet (M=3.15, SD=0.78).

The mode value for online grammar quizzes, conventional language games and online instructional games are 4, the option for Agree in the scales given in the questionnaire. This signifies that majority of the students agree that they prefer those grammar learning activities. Whereas, the mode value for hardcopy grammar exercises and pdf grammar exercises is 3, the option for neutral in the scales given in the questionnaire.

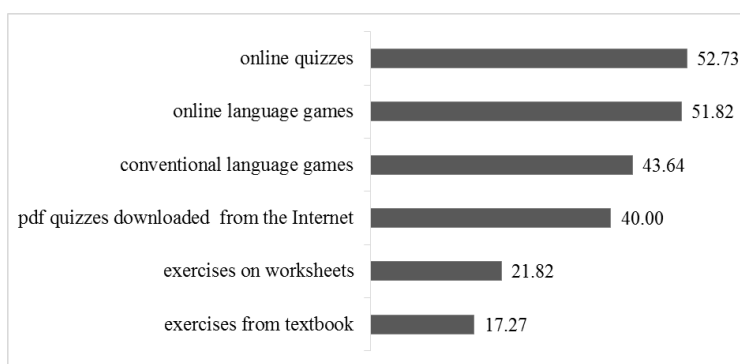
The results suggest that students preferred online grammar quizzes, conventional language games and online instructional games over hardcopy grammar exercises and pdf grammar exercises. This consistent with the findings of prior studies (Liu & Chu, 2010; Raines,

2010; Aghlara & Tamjid, 2011; Lee, 2012; Tengku Nazatul Shima & Rahmah, 2012; Schaaf, 2012; Anyaegbu et al., 2012; Jalali & Dousti, 2012; Tengku Nazatul Shima & Rahmah, 2013; Smith et al., 2013; Davoodi, 2014; Godwin-Jones, 2014; Ang, 2014; Godwin-Jones, 2014; Khonmohammad, Gorjian, & Eskandari, 2014; Taheri, 2014; Vaishnav, 2015). This may be due to preferred grammar learning activities are interesting and bring positive impacts on learning such as mentioned in literature review: making learning fun (Godwin-Jones, 2014; Ang, 2014), enhancing motivation in learning (Khonmohammad, Gorjian, & Eskandari, 2014; Anyaegbu et al., 2012; Liu & Chu, 2010; Jalali & Dousti, 2012), promoting information retention (Taheri, 2014; Aghlara & Tamjid, 2011; Smith et al., 2013), and increasing engagement (Godwin-Jones, 2014).

**b) What types of grammar learning activities that students had done voluntarily for practicing grammar outside the classroom?**

Figure 3 presents types of grammar learning activities that students had done voluntarily for practising grammar outside the classroom. Online quizzes showed the highest percentage of the type of grammar learning activities chosen by students for voluntary grammar practice outside the classroom (52.73%). It is followed by online grammar games (51.82%), showing very slight difference from online quizzes which is just only 0.91%. The less selected types of grammar learning activities were language games (43.64%) and pdf quizzes (40.00%). Whereas, the least selected types of grammar learning activities were worksheets (2.82%) and exercises from textbooks (17.27%). Therefore, it is evident that majority of the students had chosen online quizzes and online language games for practising grammar outside the classroom.

The results (see Figure 3) indicate the same trend as found in types of grammar learning activities that students prefer to do outside the classroom. Therefore, it suggests that students chose grammar learning activities that they preferred for practicing grammar outside the classroom.



**Fig.3** Types of grammar activities (in percentage) that students chose for practicing grammar voluntarily outside the classroom

**c) Are online instructional games for grammar on the Internet easy to obtain and suitable for the students' course?**

In Table 2, the mean value for Question 6 on whether it is easy to obtain online instructional games for grammar on the Internet is 3.30 (SD=0.93). The mean value is nearly the scale of 3 (neutral). It suggests that it is difficult to obtain online instructional games for grammar on the Internet. The mean value for Question 7 on whether ubiquitous online instructional games are suitable with students' course syllabus is 3.35 (SD=0.76). It suggests that ubiquitous online instructional games are not suitable with their course syllabus.

The results suggest that it was difficult for students to obtain online instructional games for grammar on the Internet. Ubiquitous online instructional games were also found not suitable with their course syllabus. The findings are inconsistent with the findings from Liu & Chu (2010). According to Mohamad & Amin (2009), most readily available learning materials cannot cater with certain learning needs of students. Mohamad & Amin (2009) prove that customized learning materials had the potential to enhance the learning of grammar.

**Table 2**  
 Questions on grammar learning activities: Questions 6 and 7

		Mean	Median	Mode	SD	SE	Confidence Level (95.0 %)
6	It is easy to find online instructional games for grammar on the Internet.	3.30	3	3	0.93	0.09	0.18
7	Ubiquitous online instructional games are suitable with my course syllabus.	3.35	3	3	0.76	0.07	0.14

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, it is evident that students preferred conventional language games and online instructional games for learning grammar outside the classroom. However, they chose online learning activities (online quizzes and online instructional games) more than conventional learning activities (exercises in pdf, textbooks and worksheets) for voluntary practice outside the classroom. Thus, the reasons for their preferences and choices of grammar learning activities need to be investigated thoroughly. Features of the grammar learning activities especially online quizzes and online instructional games need to be identified as to understand why the activities were so appealing to them that the activities were chosen for voluntary practice outside the classroom. It is hoped that when the features are identified, effective grammar learning activities



can be designed not only to sustain students' engagement in using the activities, but also promote learning to occur outside the classroom.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was presented at the 6th International Conference on e-Learning 2017 (ICeL 2017) on 7-8 November 2017 at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

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