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MALL for Motivating and Improving Grammar Skills of Iranian Middle School Learners

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) in motivating as well as developing Iranian middle school students' English grammar. To achieve this aim, the researcher adopted the experimental approach and employed a sample consisting of (70) EFL male learners studying at Shahid Mostafa Khomeini Secondary School for Boys in Varamin. The researcher randomly chose two eleventh grade classes out of the six classes in the school and randomly assigned one class consisting of (35) students as an experimental group and the other consisting of (35) students as a control group. The traditional method was used in teaching the control group; while the Mobile Assisted Language Learning was used with the experimental one in the first term of the school year (2019-2020). The collected data were analyzed and treated statistically using a T-test to identify the direction of the effectiveness. The findings of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences in learning English grammar between both groups in favor of the experimental group. This could be attributed to using MALL in teaching the experimental group. Furthermore, there were statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group in the post-application of the motivation scale. Based on the findings, the study recommends the necessity of implementing Mobile Assisted Language Learning in teaching and learning English grammar to bring about better outcomes in the Iranian students' achievements.

Keywords: *MALL, Motivation, Grammar Learning, Grammar Instruction, Iranian EFL Learners*

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1. Introduction

English is one of the foremost common languages used as lingua franka around the globe. Throughout the world, people from various countries with different mother tongues communicate with one another using English. That is why it has also been called as the language of communication. According to Niki Raga Tantri (2013) 'English has been used widely throughout the world. Today the non-native speakers of English are more than the native speakers of English.' (P.28) Ortega also (2013) points out that mortals use a language not only to speak to specific community, but sometimes to deal with themselves as in self-talk, and other times they use a language to deal with people they do not know. Focusing on English, it is an international language and is the source of information about science, technologies, engineering, farming, politics, economics, and education. (Hamdona, 2007).

Kailani and Muqattach (2003, pp. 7-9) also rightly imply that the aim of teaching and learning a language to non-native speakers is enable learners worldwide to contact and communicate as well as get knowledge in various fields through it. Learning any foreign language implies mastery over various language skills including grammar of it. Knowing grammar is a very vital component of communicative competence which can enable users to speak, use and transfer thoughts and ideas more effectively. (Vasilopoulos, 2008, p. 3). In this respect, Doff (1988, p. 32) asserts that learning the most structures of a language can enable and help learners greatly everywhere to use, speak and write the language. Without grammar, learners can communicate with others, but without accuracy. Teaching and learning English within the traditional classrooms where students learn inside the classroom with traditional methods is boring for plenty of learners, therefore the researcher is trying to seek out something exciting and more interesting for the learners to find out English well. The increasing knowledge

growth related to the expansion of technology, especially within the field of knowledge and communication, is continuously affecting teaching and learning processes inside and out of doors the varsity and classroom. Technology provides the idea for lifelong learning, and everybody can learn with the suitable technology, reckoning on their needs and skills. Teachers also have to change and transform traditional teaching and learning techniques and methods employing a type of technologies, to advance science and its effectiveness through the event of communication technologies and increasing access to information technology (Zamani, 2005). As Eaton (2010) argues, in line with such advancement and modern attributes, the method of teaching and learning in education has witnessed rapid changes in teaching and learning methodology, curriculum development, and assessment. Traditional beliefs and practices of teaching are changed to the extent that old and authoritative "teacher-centered" approaches to teaching are indeed giving thanks to more collaborative and interactive approaches. In general, the expansion of technology has had a serious impact on all aspects of human life in an exceedingly way that has revolutionized the education system of the trendy age. Azizan and Thenmolli (2018) also believe that current technology has replaced traditional practices and beliefs of teaching and presents an alternate approach to traditional education. Educational technology with its potential capabilities has had positive effects on the abilities and competencies of a people language among learners in any respect levels in society.

Mobil technology presents an alternate approach to cognitive content transfer and may help to boost the abilities and competences of a people language among L2 learners (Yunfei, 2015). Many previous studies indicate the importance of mobile learning in teaching English. Yunfei (2015) argues that mobile technologies like mobile applications can make it possible for learners to learn a foreign language easily by freely accessing the course content through various management systems. Wiwat and Ornprapat's (2015) study aimed at using mobile learning on developing the learners' vocabulary. The results of this thesis revealed that the learners who learned through mobile learning were better than those who learned through the standard way. The finding of the study also illustrated the learners had positive attitudes toward learning via mobile learning. The study of YunLin (2012) which aimed at investigating the attitudes and self-effectiveness of using mobile learning devices and tools for school learners in teaching and learning a foreign language employing task-based instruction.

2. Literature Review

Due to the rapid developments in technology, the researcher attempted to investigate the suitable methods of using mobile technology in the teaching-learning process both inside and outside of the classroom. The focus was on the learner's use with the teacher being a guide and facilitator. The following sections attempt to offer a brief survey of related studies before delving into the matter deeply.

2.1 Studies Related to Teaching and Learning of Grammar

Jendeya's (2015) study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the 5E Model (i.e. Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration, and Evaluation) on developing tenth graders' English grammar learning and their attitudes towards English. The researcher used the experimental approach to achieve the aim of the study. The sample of the study consisted of (68) EFL male learners studying at Jamal Abdu- Nasser Secondary School for Boys in the Gaza Strip. The researcher designed and applied an achievement test – pre/ posttest- and also used an attitude scale to measure the learners' attitudes towards English language. The results reflected that there were significant and important differences in learning English grammar between both groups: the experimental and the control ones, favoring the experimental one.

Another study by Saker (2015) aimed at investigating the effectiveness of using Jigsaw strategy on Palestinian tenth graders' English grammar learning. The researcher used the experimental approach to achieve the aim of this thesis. The sample of this study contained (72) EFL male learners divided equally into two groups. The first one was experimental in which the jigsaw strategy was used in teaching. The second one controlled in which the traditional method was used in teaching. The implementation took place in the second term of the scholastic year (2013-2014). The researcher designed and used an achievement test - pre/ posttest- to achieve the purpose of the study. The results revealed that there were significant, vital and important differences in learning English grammar between both the experimental

group and the control one, favoring the experimental one. Gaza and Nguyen (2014) also investigated if learners' oral communication and grammatical information, and their attitudes were affected by the communicative grammar teaching method. They used the experimental approach to achieve the aim of this thesis. Their results indicated that communicative grammar teaching assisted the learners to improve and develop their grammar competence. In addition, this implementation showed positive attitudes in which the learners interested in grammar lessons. Another study by Abu Shagga (2014) investigated the effectiveness of using computerized educational games on developing aspects of English grammar among deaf ninth-graders in Gaza Governorates. The quasi-experimental approach was used by the researcher to achieve the purpose of the study. The findings of the study showed that there were statistically significant differences among the learners owing to the use of the computerized educational games. Besides, there were no statistically significant differences between the deaf learners owing to the gender variable.

Ishtawi (2011) also explored the effect of gaming strategy on English grammar learning among the grade twelve learners at Gaza governmental schools. The researcher used the experimental approach to achieve the aim of this study. The sample of this study contained (80) male learners in which they were divided equally into two groups, experimental and control, from Palestine Secondary School in West Gaza. The results asserted that there were statistically significant differences between both groups, in favor of the experimental group.

2.2 Studies Related to Using Mobile Technology for Learning

On the use of Mobile technology for teaching and learning, Huang et al. (2016) attempted to develop a 5-step vocabulary learning (FSVL) strategy. It included five steps: encountering, getting, comprehending, consolidating and using and employing mobile learning device for developing learners' motivation and their English performance. The sample of this study included 80 EFL learners and 1 teacher. The findings indicated that the learners' motivation and performance, who studied via the FSVL strategy and mobile learning device, were superior to their counterparts who studied via the FSVL strategy and traditional learning. In another study, Wang (2016) aimed to develop a mobile-assisted learning system and examine if it could promote classical Chinese learners via the flipped classroom approach. The researcher used a quasi-experimental approach to realize the aim of the study. The sample of this study included 56 learners (grade eleven) who were chosen from two classes. The experimental students studied classical Chinese with the flipped classroom learning strategy with the assistance of the CMACC system, while the control learners studied classical Chinese with the flipped classroom learning strategy without the assistance of the CMACC system. The findings indicated that each one of the learners developed their performance, but the learners of the experimental students revealed better motivation, while control students attended be more passive. In short, the mobile-assisted learning system added value in providing students with chances to realize flipped classroom learning anywhere and anytime.

Suwantarathip and Orawiwatnakul (2015) also explored the effectiveness of mobile-assisted vocabulary exercises on vocabulary acquisition of first-year learners. The researchers used the experimental approach to realize the aim of the study. The results indicated that the performance of learners within the experimental group was better than that of the learners within the control group. Therefore, Mobile learning had a big and important effect on the learners from experimental group. Besides, the findings of the questionnaire indicated that the experimental learners had positive attitudes towards mobile learning. In short, using mobile phones as a learning device can increase learners' achievement and learning motivation. Branagan (2015) study also asserted a positive attitude towards mobile learning and its applications. Further, mobile learning and applications are often utilized in English classes and learners' self-study. Putnik (2015) also recommended developing and organizing m-Learning as an addition, support, enhancement and supplement to the training and teaching process due to ample and additional possibilities for the utilization of mobile learning technologies in any sort of education.

In a similar note, Shihsien (2012) also Investigated college learners' attitudes and self-efficacy of using mobile learning tools by employing task-based instruction. The sample of this study were 58 Taiwanese learners who used mobile tools to finish

assigned works under the assistance of the educator. The findings indicated that most of the participants had high motivation for English learning and positive attitudes toward m-learning. It also increased their learning motivation, promoted imaginative work and individualized and collaborative learning. Ramli (2010) also explored if students were willing to use mobile learning, transferring information through SMS particularly in the distance learning field. The results indicated that the learners' academic and job performances were increased and enhanced.

Basoglu and Akdemir (2010) attempted to explore the impact of use of mobile learning through smartphones on Turkish learners' English vocabulary learning. The findings implied that the learners who used mobile or smartphones in learning vocabulary had positive impacts on their vocabulary learning.

2.3 Studies related to Use of Mobile Learning Applications

Focusing on MALL in teaching and learning, Lin et al. (2015) attempted to promote learning interest and practical skills among the learners by using mobile learning applications. The results showed that the use of mobile learning applications had significant positive effects on academic performance and the majority of the learners had positive attitudes towards using the mobile learning system. Barhoumi (2015) also explored the effectiveness of mobile learning, particularly use of WhatsApp. The results indicated that using mobile learning technologies, online lectures, were more effective compared to face-to-face ones. Zou and Li's (2015) study also reported that majority of the learners had positive attitude towards mobile learning and the applications. They also had high motivation while carrying out closely connected activities. In addition, mobile learning and applications can be used in English language classes and learners' self-study in which the learners can practice the English language both inside and outside the classroom.

2.4 Use of Mobile Technologies for Learning Grammar and Vocabulary

Kennedy and Levy (2008) argue that traditional methods might not be enough in teaching the English language. According to them, good English proficiency comes from an honest grasp of grammar to overcome the issues of low English proficiency among Iranian second language learners. Therefore, it is important to spot the key motivators that would facilitate the method of grammar learning during this digital age. Technology can play a really important role and mobile technology might be one among them. The use of mobile technologies in education is usually called mobile learning, or just m-learning or MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning). M-learning is introduced globally as a versatile learning approach nowadays. M-learning takes learning to those learners who were previously too remote, socially, or geographically, for other kinds of educational initiatives (Traxler, 2009).

Some previous studies have investigated the role of SMS through mobile in learning the language. Kennedy and Levy (2008) and Levy and Kennedy (2005) report a technique towards the incorporation of SMS to language classes. In these studies, learners were given Italian vocabularies, expressions, and sample sentences as SMS messages through their cell phones. Both studies reported that the incorporation of SMS as an instructional tool was successful. Moreover, participants held a positive perception about the incorporation of SMS as a learning tool. Lu (2008) found out that the use of SMS in language classes enhances language learners' intercultural awareness as well as critical thinking skills. Two other studies (Thornton & Houser, 2005; Zhang et al., 2011) studied the role of SMS in enhancing language learners' vocabulary acquisition. The results were in line with previous studies (i.e. effectiveness of SMS). Lu (2008), recruited 30 senior high school students and through adopting a quasi-experimental design, divided them into two groups. The experimental group acquired English vocabulary through SMS, while the control group took the usual paper-based materials. The findings revealed that experimental group participants achieved higher scores than control group participants in their vocabulary test. Zhang et al. (2011) in a similar study confirmed Lu's (2008) findings. In another study, Motallebzadeh and Ganjali (2011) studied the role of SMS in enhancing vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension of 40 English learners. The findings showed that SMS utilization results in the development of vocabulary knowledge as well as reading comprehension skills. In recent study, Taghizadeh & Porkar (2018) offered a rational view that despite many benefits of MALL a language class must not be entirely mobile centered because this may reduce the role of the teacher who should be the real provider of the input and the inspiration in

the class. The argument in this study has been in line with his view.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study included 70 participants from Tehran Governorate schools. Two classes randomly in Shaheed Mostafa Khomeini Gymnasium were purposively selected because the researcher worked there as a teacher. Classes were originally distributed in consistent with their results by the college administration beforehand. So, all of the participants were equal within their general achievement as revealed in the statistical treatment of their ends up in the primary term of the school year (2019-2020). These participants were divided randomly into two groups: one control group and one experimental group. Each group contained 35 participants.

3.2 Materials

The first instrument utilized during this study was an achievement Test. This test contained four parts and every part contained 48 items. Every item had one mark. Thus, the whole test was of 48 marks. The four parts of the study tried to test four different domain of the grammar such as; Structures (Hope and Wish), The conjunctions (As long as - provided ' that ' – unless), Obligations (must – haven't got to – had to), and Would rather – Prefer. Different parts of this test composed of various formats like True (T) or False (F), Choose the proper answer, Do as shown in brackets, and Choose the proper word/phrase from the box to fill within the blank spaces. The validity of the study was calculated by using Pearson Formula and it had a suitable validity. The reliability of the test was measured by KR20 and also the Spilt-half techniques. The results showed that the Spilt-half coefficient is (0.924) and KR20 is (0.947) which implied that the reliability of the test was high and robust. The second instrument of the study was a motivation test. This test was also a teacher-made test that attempted to see the effect of mobile learning on boosting students' motivation in pre and posttest of the study. The test contained 40 items in four domains including; Motivation for Learning English, Motivation for Enjoying Learning English, Motivation towards Teacher of English and Methodology, and Motivation for learning English Grammar. This scale was introduced to experienced supervisors, specialists, and teachers within the English language so as to test the validity of the study. The reliability of the size was measured by the Alpha Cronbach technique and also the Spilt-half techniques. Results showed that the Alpha Cronbach coefficient is (0.875) and also the Spilt-half coefficient is (0.780) which is appropriate reliability. The third instrument during this study was Mobile Learning Applications. This application was designed by the researcher with the assistance of a technologist for both online and offline modes. This App, generally, contains two stages. The primary stage is about explanation, examples, questions - offline - and a movie - online – which supports the reason and examples outside the classroom, within which the learners can study the teachings on their own and take the time that suits them. Second stage about quizzes in three phases. After finishing the quiz, the info - time and marks – were collected by the appliance for each learner.

3.3 Procedure

After consulting and obtaining permission from the Varamin Department of Education and also the school management of Shaheed Mostafa Khomeini middle school initially, a pilot test was conducted to test the initial consistency and suitability of the participants. Secondly, the participants were randomly divided into two different groups namely; experimental and control groups. In the third stage, the achievement and motivation scale was administrated to both control and experimental groups within the first term of the school year to test the interior consistency and initial level of the grammar knowledge of the participants. After that, both experimental and control groups received the identical instruction during five weeks- two sessions every week, each session one hour and a half-within the school. The learners within the control group received ordinary classroom instructions in each session. They received an identical textbook. Grammar knowledge was taught in traditional ways. In the experimental group, all the learners received identical materials by utilizing mobile learning assistance and application. All the learners within the experimental group had smartphones and they were required to put in the appliance. Every grammar point and structure was taught by utilizing this application. Finally, the identical achievement and motivation test was administered as a posttest to both experimental and control groups at the top of the course. In the end, after analyzing the collected data and giving interpretations, the results were shown in tables and graphs.

4. Results

Firstly, for answering the primary research question and determining the foremost important grammar points that require to be developed among eleventh graders, some interviews were administered by the researcher with English supervisors, teachers and a few students of grade twelve at the beginning of the primary semester. Accordingly, the subsequent are grammar points that are got to be developed among eleventh graders: Structures after (Hope and Wish), the conjunctions (As long as - provided ' that ' – unless), Obligations (must – do not have to – had to), and Expressing preferences (would rather – Prefer). During the second stage, the type of Mobile Learning Environment needed to develop eleventh graders' English grammar was decided. After studying and analyzing the ADDIE model, which stands for Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation were selected because of the required mobile learning environment of the study. The most a part of the study tried to see the effectiveness of mobile-assisted learning.

The quantitative data employed for the present study involved pre- and post-achievement tests. The pre- and post-test results were analyzed quantitatively implementing the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). For the pre- and post-tests' analysis, T-test tests were applied to match the scores obtained from the performance of the experimental and control groups. After conducting the pretest and collecting data, test scores obtained by experimental and control groups were analyzed using the SPSS software package using the independent sample T-test to determine whether there have been significant differences between two groups of participants at the 0.05 alpha level or not. After conducting the pretest and collecting data, test scores obtained by experimental and control groups were analyzed using the SPSS software package using the independent sample T-test to determine whether there have been significant differences between two groups of participants at the 0.05 alpha level or not.

Table 1: *Sample t-test of Pretest Performance of English grammar achievement variable.*

	GROUP	N	M	SD	t	df	sig
	experimental	35	22.886	3.634			
Pretest					0.115	68	0.909
	control	35	23.000	3.411			

According to the pre-test results, the importance level was above 0.05 (df=68; p=0.909) which implies that there were no significant differences between the 2 groups before the implementation of the study (Table 1). These results, at the very initial stage of the study show that both groups were at an equivalent level of grammar knowledge proficiency. After implementing the treatment, an equivalent grammar Achievement Test was given to students as a posttest. An equivalent statistical method was used for the posttest results. The statistical analysis of the posttest for the experimental and therefore the control groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Sample t-test of Posttest Performance of English grammar achievement variable.*

	GROUP	N	M	SD	t	df	sig
	experimental	35	38.200	4.922			
Posttest					6.236	68	0.000
	control	35	26.743	3.008			

As the results show, the importance level was less than 0.05 (df=68; p=0.000), which implies that there was a statistically significant difference between the 2 groups. In other words, the participants within the experimental group using mobile-assisted learning while studying grammar points items performed significantly better than the participants within the control group who practiced traditional grammar learning activities. These findings showed the effectiveness of using technology in learning English and supply solid evidence for the advantage of using mobile devices in grammar learning.

For checking the motivation scale, equivalent procedures were run in pre and posttest format. The following table sums the students' performance within the pretest sage (Table 3).

Table 3: *Sample t-test of pretest Performance controlling the motivation scale.*

	GROUP	N	M	SD	t	df	sig
	experimental	35	128.343	13.359			
Posttest					1.080	68	0.284
	control	35	132.514	18.532			

Table 3 indicates that there have been no statistically significant differences between the experimental and therefore the control groups thanks to the pre-application of the motivation scale and this means the equivalence of both groups. After conducting the treatment, an equivalent motivation test was run as a posttest of the study.

Table 4: *Sample t-test of posttest Performance of controlling the motivation scale.*

	GROUP	N	M	SD	t	df	sig
	experimental	35	158.971	17.736			
Posttest					4.712	68	0.000
	control	35	136.114	22.565			

As shown in the Table 4, the results showed that there are significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) within the total mean score of the post-application of the motivation scale between the experimental and control groups favoring the experimental group. The mean of the posttest application of the motivation scale within the experimental group reached (158.971), whereas the mean of the control group was (136.114). These results indicate that using Mobile Learning Application is simpler than the normal method in developing the learners' Motivation for English learning.

In sum, the findings reflected that the instruction through the technology and mobile assisted learning for teaching English grammar and improving student's motivation had positive effect and advantage over the normal method since the learners in the experimental group outperformed those participants in the control group.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The main goal of the present study was to explore the effectiveness of mobile assisted learning on grammar learning. There is evidence suggesting that mobile devices are often effective in grammar learning. The mobile is the most used technology in Iran. Most of the students own and carry a mobile most of the time. In Iran, there are offers by which individuals may pay fixed rates per month giving them access to the web, and lots of students cash in of those offers. So, the researcher had attempted to explore this technology for grammar instruction. The main aim of the present study was to explore learning grammar structures via application assisted learning software by EFL students in Iran and its contribution to learners' perception and also to research the effectiveness of mobile learning techniques on improving students' motivation.

The results seemed to manifest that learners' perception and motivation were improved by incorporating mobile-based instruction within the learning classroom. The findings indicated a big difference between the experimental and control groups with reference to their grammar knowledge and motivation. Web-based materials enhanced EFL learners' grammar knowledge and motivation. As mentioned earlier, this study was designed to work out the effectiveness of mobile learning applications on improving students' English grammar and increasing their motivation for English. All students of the experimental group showed improvement in their performance in grammar achievement posttest. Additionally, the experimental group showed that the participants' motivation improved after the implementation of the Mobile Learning Application. Such positive change was very clear through students' responses to the motivation scale. This suggests that using Mobile Learning Application in developing the learners' grammar and their motivation for English was very effective. The findings of this study support many researchers' claims about the effectiveness of incorporating technology with English learning. In terms of grammar learning, many sorts of research and studies are done to shed light on the method of mobile learning. for instance, the results of this study is in line with Böhm et al. (2016), Huang et al. (2016), Mellati and Khademi (2015), Yilmaz and Sanalan (2015), Kristen and Alan (2015), Singaravelu (2009), Chen et al. (2008). All of those researchers conducted researches and confirmed the effectiveness of Mobile Learning generally and Mobile Learning applications especially on developing students' grammar achievement. On the other hand, in terms of technology and motivation, many studies have shown the impact of technology generally and mobile learning especially, in line with this study, on boosting students' motivation and interest. For instance, Chen et al. (2016), Böhm and Constantine (2016), Vibulphol (2016), Redondo and Martín (2015), Mehmet et al. (2015), Su and Cheng (2015), and Çetin (2014), showed that Mobile Learning had a superior role in increasing the learners' Motivation.

The findings of this study may offer some implications for teaching and learning. Students through technology generally and mobile application learning especially, have numerous opportunities like reflecting on studying through authentic materials and communicating with their companions from everywhere the planet via chat programs. To recap, this study has attempted to prove that an application helped learners to accumulate grammar structures and motivation compared to other traditional or paper-based strategies or activities.

The results concluded that designing computer-based course books and incorporating computers, technology, and mobile phones into teaching classrooms can improve learners' knowledge in their academic achievement and motivation. Determining the effectiveness of technology-based materials and mobile application learning are often beneficial for learning curriculum designers to present tasks and materials incorporated with technology and computer-based materials. This analysis showed that the appliance of mobile devices is often effective in most aspects of grammar learning. Findings from this study have significant implications for future work. It is apparent from the analysis that mobile devices can have a positive effect on grammar learning. However, further studies are needed to look at the effect of mobile devices on productive skills of spoken, written, and word parts. The findings of this study may have implications for teachers, learners, and curriculum designers. The knowledge of how Web-based and mobile instruction may influence students' learning can help teachers make more informed decisions on the way to provide input. The findings can also help materials developers and syllabus designers to think about the importance of mobile learning while planning textbooks and materials. Broadly, the prime goal of the present study was to research learning grammar and boosting motivation via mobile grammar learning applications. The results seemed to manifest that learners' perceptions improved by incorporating application instruction in learning classrooms. The findings indicated a big difference between the experimental and control group with reference to their grammar knowledge and motivation. It is noteworthy to say that, this study tried to shed light on the effect of mobile devices on just grammar leaning without considering the opposite parts and skills of the language. Other studies are required to see the effectiveness of mobile learning on other aspects of language such as; speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, and so on. Considering grammar learning because of the main goal of this study, it's suggested to require other skills like reading and writing under consideration in other researches. Since different age groups have different personality features, an equivalent study might be administered among students at different age range and language proficiency levels.

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