



The Effect of Using Crossword Puzzle on First Intermediate Students' Achievement and Interest in English

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Received : 31 / 03 / 2026
Revised : 21 / 04 / 2026
Accepted : 26 / 04 / 2026
Available : 03 / 06 / 2026

Keywords:

Achievement,
Crossword puzzle,
First Intermediate,
Interest.

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the effective role of the crossword puzzle in developing first intermediate students' achievement and interest in English. As such, two null hypotheses have been set. The population of the study includes first-grade female students at the intermediate stage in the city of Mosul during the academic year 2025-2026. The sample consists of 78 female students, evenly divided into the experimental group who were taught according to the crossword puzzle, and the control group who were taught according to the conventional method. The post-test equivalent groups represented the experimental design. The research hypotheses have been validated on the basis of the relevant achievement and interest tests. By applying the T-test of two distinct groups to the collected data, there have been statistically significant differences between the two groups, as the experimental group has outperformed the control group on both the achievement and interest tests.

أثر استخدام الكلمات المتقاطعة في تحصيل طالبات الصف الاول المتوسط ورغبتهم في مادة اللغة الانكليزية

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الملخص

يهدف البحث الحالي الى دراسة الدور الفعال للكلمات المتقاطعة في تحصيل طالبات الصف الاول المتوسط ورغبتهم في مادة اللغة الانكليزية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم وضع فرضيتين صفرية. يتألف مجتمع البحث من طالبات الصف الاول المتوسط في مركز مدينة الموصل للعام الدراسي 2025-2026. تكونت عينة البحث من 78 طالبة تم توزيعهن بشكل متساو بين المجموعة التجريبية التي جرى تدريسها طبقاً لاستراتيجية الكلمات المتقاطعة والمجموعة الضابطة التي درست باستخدام الطريقة التقليدية. تبنت الباحثة التصميم التجريبي ذي المجموعتين المتكافئتين ذات الاختبار البعدي. كما أعدت الباحثة اختباري التحصيل والرغبة لاختبار فرضيتي البحث. وبعد معالجة البيانات احصائياً باستخدام الاختبار التائي لعينتين مستقلتين، اظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دالة احصائية بين المجموعتين لصالح المجموعة التجريبية في الاختبارين التحصيلي والرغبة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحصيل، الكلمات المتقاطعة، الاول المتوسط، الرغبة.

1. Introduction

Teaching English language at intermediate level witnesses escalating interest due to the nature of this stage as a transformational. It is the first step where students have the chance to practice their basic linguistics skills; i.e. can communicate, understand, write, and express. Vocabulary is one of essential elements to master a language. Recently, many methods and strategies have been proved to play a crucial role in developing a new language vocabulary, reading and writing. One of these strategies is the crossword puzzle. This strategy has proved its effectiveness in developing the linguistic skills, connecting ideas, and enhancing the ability to write coherent and more precise texts, hence bringing about better achievement in learning English (Tambunan, 2023: 25).

2. Problem of the Research

Learning English for many students forms a difficult educational task and experience due to their inability to understand and connect sentences as they lack the basic skills to have a good and effective mastery of the learning. There is noticeable weakness by many intermediate school students who fail to manage learning English and practice it in everyday situations to the level they are supposed to.

The present researcher attributes such a problem to the absence or rarity of the use of various methods and strategies including crossword puzzle, at the time these strategies have not been handled as required.

3. Significance of the Study

The study is expected to be of high importance as it is geared towards:

- 1- Shedding light on a new strategy, viz. crossword puzzle for the teaching/learning English,
- 2- Familiarizing English language teachers with crossword puzzle to improve their students' achievement and enhance their interest in English, and
- 3- Utilizing the findings for the conduction of further researches on the crossword puzzles in terms of their nature and importance.

4. Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate the effect of using the crossword puzzle on first intermediate students' achievement and interest in English.

5. Hypotheses

This study hypothesizes the following:

1. "There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group taught according to the crossword puzzle and the control group taught on the basis of the conventional method on the achievement test".
2. "There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group taught according to the crossword puzzle and the control group taught by using the conventional method on the interest test".

6. Limits of the Study

This research is limited to a sample of 1st intermediate female students in the city of Mosul, during the academic year (2025-2026). The teaching material is limited to units 1 and 2 of the Pupil's Book for the 1st intermediate of English for Iraq.

7. Definitions of Basic Terms

In this section, definitions of some basic terms are presented as follows:

- Crossword Puzzle

According to Dhand (2008: 6), a crossword puzzle is a "puzzle with sets of squares to be filled in with words/numbers, and one letter/number to each square synonyms or definitions of words are given with numbers corresponding to numbers in the squares. Letters/words are fitted into a pattern of numbered squares is answer to clues".

Febtrina et al. (2010: 4) define a crossword puzzle as "a puzzle game which normally takes the form of a square or a rectangular grid of white and black shaded squares. The goal is to fill the white squares with letters, forming words or phrases, by solving clues which lead to the answers".

The operational definition of a crossword puzzle is: A teaching strategy that is used by English language teachers to enhance the achievement and interest of their 1st year intermediate female students in learning English.

- Interest

Persal (1998: 951) defines interest as "a state of wanting to know or learn about something or someone".

According to Cambridge dictionary (2026: 233), interest is "the feeling of wanting to give your attention to something or of wanting to be involved with and to discover more about something".

The operational definition of interest is: Interest is the positive feeling of 1st year intermediate female students to get involved in learning English and having better achievement in the language.

- Achievement

Webster (1973: 11) states that achievement is "the quality and quantity of students' work".

An achievement test, according to Richards et al. (1992: 3) is, "a test which measures how much of a language someone has learned with reference to a particular course of study or programme of instruction".

The operational definition of achievement is the extent of language learning that 1st year intermediate students have learned according to the cross word puzzle.

8. Theoretical Background

8.1 Crossword Puzzle: Definition and Function

According to Jones (1998, cited in Lestari, 2002) a "crossword puzzle is a wonderful means of developing vocabulary, spelling, and language skills from childhood through adulthood". As such, when considering crossword puzzle as a teaching/learning strategy the age of individuals, partners, or small groups should be accounted for (Tambunan, 2023: 25). On his part, Adenan adds that there are games and puzzles that form effective examples of self- motivating, interesting,

and challenging language-learning exercises. The crossword puzzle form an example of these games as it raises learners' interest in learning English (Adenan, 1992: 32).

8.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Use of Crossword Puzzles

Lestari (2002), Franklin et al. (2003), and Auliya Qurat A'yun (2023) indicate that the crossword puzzle is beneficial as it:

- develops vocabulary, spelling and language skills from childhood through adulthood,
- motivates students to be more active in learning,
- develops students' independence and enhances their responsibility and discipline,
- deepens students' understanding of learning,
- creates healthy competition among students,
- can significant increase students' motivation and students' interest in the topic, and
- has learning outcomes that are more sustainable according to learning meetings.

On the other hand, Auliya Qurat A'yun (2023) mentions the following disadvantages of the crossword puzzle:

- Students can imitate the work of the individual,
- Students' tasks can be done by others, and
- If done without clear instructions, it may be confusing.

9. Interest

As Dechant (1982) points out, interest is the "positive attraction toward objects or events. Interest is a set of attending, the tendency to give selective attention to something. Interest arises through the interaction of basic needs and the means used to satisfy them".

According to Purnawanto (2013: 6), the word interest refers to "the positive response or attitude toward something the people like, enjoy, and appreciate which make them having a desire to do".

Anas (2008: 18) states that "a good English Teaching Programme must create desire to read and help the individual to find pleasure moment in the reaction of reading to guide the learners because reading for and achievement in reading or also dependent upon the learners' motivation readiness, and poor reading or reading future may be caused by lack of interest".

10. Previous Studies on Crossword Puzzle:

This section presents some previous studies related to the current study in one way or another.

Ratnawati et al. (2013) studied the effect of using crossword puzzle on the vocabulary achievement of the 8th year students at SMP Negeri 5 Jember. A pre-experimental design, with nonequivalent-groups posttest- only design was used. The sample was divided into two groups namely experimental and control. The experimental group was taught vocabulary by using crossword puzzle, while the control group was taught vocabulary according to the lecturing method. The t-test formula was used to analyze the students' vocabulary achievement scores. The results indicated statistically significant differences between the two groups in favour of the experimental group.

Wefi et al. (2023) identified the effect of using crossword puzzles on learners' vocabulary development in English as a foreign language context. 36 grade seven students from of SMP Annur Assalafy Pasuruan, formed the sample and were divided into an experimental group and a control. This study was conducted in the experiments design, a semi-empirical study using quantitative techniques. The results showed that the use of crossword puzzles effectively improved students' vocabulary acquisition.

11. Methodology

This section introduces the methodology followed in the current research.

11.1 The Empirical Design

The experimental design of posttest equivalent groups was adopted.

11.2 The Population

The population of this research subsumes the female students in the first intermediate class in Mosul city center during the academic year 2025-2026.

11.3 Sample of the Study

The first intermediate students of Al-Mutfoqat Secondary school for females was chosen to be the sample of this study. Group A was nominated as the experimental group, i.e. the group taught by using crossword puzzle, while group B was nominated as the control group, i.e. the group taught by using the prescribed method.

11.4 Equivalence of the Groups

The researcher made parity between the two groups before applying the experiment. Such a procedure attends to a number of variables, namely pupils' age in months, mark in English for the preceding year, and intelligence.

Table (1) The Calculated T Value of Valence Variables for the Two Groups

Variables	Groups	No.	Means	SD.	T- Value		Significance level at 0.05
					Calculated	Tabulated	
Students' age in months	Experimental	39	146.128	13.20	1.11	1.992	Equal
	Control	39	146.076	13.05			
Degree in English for the Preceding year	Experimental	39	97.743	4.61	0.43		Equal
	Control	39	98.307	4.53			
Degree of Intelligent	Experimental	39	36.30	8.09	0.42		Equal
	Control	39	37.01	8.02			

No = 78 T-tabulated value at (0.05) level, (76) df = 1.992 (Ferguson, 1981:487)

As the T-tabulated value 1.992 is higher than T- calculated value, the two groups were equivalent in all variables.

12. Research Tools

To collect data for the study, the following research tools were utilized:

12.1 Lesson Plan

On the basis of the method adopted in teaching both groups, the researcher designed a crossword puzzle lesson plan for the experimental group and a

conventional lesson plan for the control group (See Appendix 1). A panel of juries validated and approved both methods and also made some modification that were considered by the researcher.

12.2 Achievement and Interest Tests

The researcher herself prepared the achievement test by relying on the textbook of the English for Iraq/ 1st intermediate (See Appendix 2). The achievement test items were presented to some jury members specialized in education and methods of teaching to approve their validity.

The researcher also prepared the 18-items interest test by relying on the available literature (See Appendix 3).

12.2.1 Validity

According to Verma and Beard (1981: 87), validity is "the degree of success with which a technique or other instrument is measuring what it claims to measure". Face validity was used by the researcher in this study. The achievement and interest tests were also submitted to a panel of juries to judge their validity of application. 88% of the consulting specialists agreed that the tests were valid.

12.2.2 Reliability

According to Heaten (1988: 162), reliability is "the stability of the test score. It is a necessary characteristic of any good test to be valid, it should first be reliable as a measuring instrument". The test-retest reliability method and Person Correlation Coefficient with Spearman-Brown prophecy formula were applied to compute the reliability of the research tool, and it came out to be 85 %.

12.2.3 The Pilot Study

After preparing the items for the achievement and interest tests, the researcher piloted the tools on a group consisting of 40 students in the 1st intermediate / section (c). The tools were found out to be comprehensible and acceptable by the students.

13. The Experiment

After achieving equivalence between the two groups, the teacher started teaching English to both groups according to the daily plans prepared by the researcher. The experiment started on 23rd, September, 2025 and ended on 20th, November, 2025.

On 24th of November 2025, both post-tests of achievement and interest were administered to the two groups.

14. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

This section presents the results arrived at after analyzing the collected data, followed by the discussion of such results:

14.1 "There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group taught by using the crossword puzzle and the control group taught by using the conventional method on the achievement test".

The results are presented in Table 2.

Table (2): T-Test Results of the Achievement Test for the Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	No.	Mean	SD.	T- Calculated	T- Tabulated	Significance level at 0.05
Experimental	39	87.24	10.51	7.58	1.992	There is a statistically significant difference
Control	39	70.10	8.62			

The results presented in table (2) indicate that the first hypothesis is rejected because the calculated- T value, viz. 7.58 is higher than the tabulated- T value 1.992. This result is attributed to the effectiveness of the crossword puzzles in increasing students' achievement. This is also due to the role of crossword puzzles in making the learning process enjoyable and exciting for students to the extent that it motivated them to participate actively and interactively.

In addition, the crossword puzzles gave students more opportunities to apply linguistic concepts practically, as the grammar was applied directly within the context of the organized interactive activities.

14.2 "There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group taught by using the crossword puzzle and the control group taught by using the conventional method on the interest test", the T- values were calculated as presented in Table 3.

Table (3): T-Test Results of the Interest Test for the Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	No.	Mean	SD.	T- Calculated	T- Tabulated	Significance level at 0.05
Experimental	39	48.15	11.03	5.76	1.992	There is a statistically significant difference
Control	39	35.20	9.12			

Based on Table 3, it is evident that the T- calculated value is higher than the T- tabulated value. As such, the second hypothesis is rejected.

The results demonstrated statistically significant differences between the two groups in favour of the experimental group who were taught by the crossword puzzle strategy. This is due to the fact that using crossword puzzles boosted students' interest to learn English, raised their confidence in using English, and created a positive interest in the English language.

15. Conclusions

On the basis of the results arrived at, it can be concluded that:

- 1- The crossword puzzle can be used effectively in teaching English, to improve students' achievement, since it makes students feel more enthusiastic and active to learn.
- 2- The use of crossword puzzle enhanced students' memory, improved their ability to retain information, and increased their achievement.

3- Increasing students' achievement in English led them to have a more positive interest in English.

16. Recommendations

In light of the findings of the current research, the following recommendations have been forwarded:

- 1- Encouraging teachers to use crossword puzzles in teaching English at intermediate stage as an effective strategy for teaching English.
- 2- Conducting training courses for English language teachers so as to familiarize them with the use of crossword puzzles in teaching, and duly raise their students' achievement.
- 3- English language teachers should pay more attention to students' interest by using new methods and strategies in teaching English as interest raises students' achievement and their confidence in using English every day.

17. Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher suggests the following as topics for further studies:

- 1- Conducting a similar study using crossword puzzles with other variables.
- 2- Conducting a similar study with male students.

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Appendix 1

The Validity of Teaching Plans

University of Mosul

College of Basic Education

Department of English

Teaching Plans

Honourable professor

Good Greeting,

The researcher is conducting a study titled "The Effect of Using Crossword Puzzle on First Stage Intermediate Students' Achievement and Interest in English". To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher has prepared a daily lesson plan. In light of your experience, know-how, and scientific outlook in this field, you have been nominated to go through the plan, add, delete and/or modify the items so as to prove the validity of the plan.

Your effort and time are highly appreciated.

The Researcher

A Daily Lesson Plan / The Experimental Group

Day: Material: English

Date: Unit: 1

Class: 1st Intermediate Lesson: 1

Subject: The holidays

(A) Objectives: Enable the student to:

- 1- Use and understand vocabulary related to holidays.
- 2- Ask and answer questions about holidays' activities.
- 3- Practice spelling and meaning through a crossword activity.
- 4- Improve speaking and collaboration skills

(B) Vocabulary: camping, fishing, swimming, shopping, cooking, museum, zoo, football, match, listening to music, reading books.

(C) Teaching Aids: Textbook (unit1, lesson1), crossword puzzle worksheet, flash cards or pictures of activities, audio track, whiteboard and markers.

(D) Procedures:

A- Warm-up

- 1- Greet the class and ask: "What did you do in the holidays?"
Encourage short answers: "I went swimming.", "I stayed at home."
- 2- Show pictures of different holidays activities.
- 3- Elicit or teach the vocabulary if students don't recall it.

B- Presentation

- 1- Read the dialogue from the textbook (Ahmed- Faisal- Rasha- Huda- Muna).
- 2- Explain new words and model pronunciation.
- 3- Ask comprehension questions:
- "Where did Faisal go?"
- "What did Muna and Huda do?"

C- Practice crossword strategy

- 1- Give students a crossword puzzle containing the holiday vocabulary.
- 2- Across/Down clues example:

- Across 2: You do this in a tent. (→ camping)

- Across 3: You see animals there. (→ zoo)

3- Students work in pairs or small groups to complete it.

4- Encourage them to use English: "What's number 4?" " I think it's shopping."

D- Production

1- In pairs, students create short dialogues using at least 3 of the crossword words:

Example:

* A: "Did you go away in the holidays?"

* B: Yes, I went camping and fishing."

E- Wrap-up

1- Review key vocabulary from the crossword.

2- Praise effort and teamwork.

3- Assign homework: write 5 sentences about what they did in their last holiday.

(E) Assessment

1- Observation during group work (participation and communication).

2- Complete crossword puzzle.

3- Oral performance in pair dialogues.

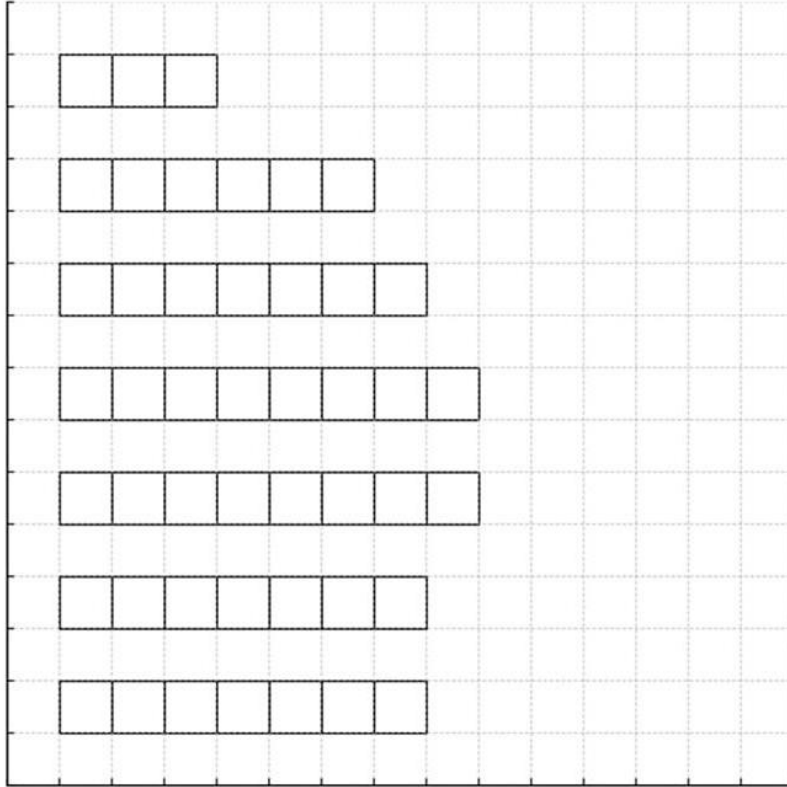
(F) Differentiation

1- For weaker students: provide word banks or picture clues.

2- For stronger students: ask them to make their own crossword clues.

English Lesson Crossword: The Holidays

****Page 1: Student Version (Blank Grid)****



Write the words from the clues into the crossword grid.

Clues:

1. You sleep in a tent outside.
2. You catch fish in a river or the sea.
3. You do this in a pool or the sea.
4. You buy things at the mall or market.
5. You make food in the kitchen.
6. You see old things and art here.
7. You see animals here.
8. You watch people play this sport.
9. You use your ears to enjoy songs.
10. You do this to learn or enjoy stories.

Appendix 2

The Validity of the Achievement Test

University of Mosul

College of Basic Education

Department of English

The Achievement Test

Honourable professor

Good Greeting,

The researcher is conducting a study titled "The Effect of Using Crossword Puzzle on First Stage Intermediate Students' Achievement and Interest in English ". To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher has prepared an achievement test. In light of your experience, know-how, and scientific outlook in this field, you have been nominated to go through the test, add, delete and/or modify the items so as to prove the validity of the test.

Your effort and time are highly appreciated.

The Researcher:

Q1/ Read the following passage carefully, then answer the questions below:

Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is located in the Himalayas on the border between Nepal and Tibet. It stands at a staggering height of 8,849 meters above sea level. Every year, hundreds of climbers from around the world attempt to reach its summit. The journey is challenging due to harsh weather, thin air, and dangerous terrain. Despite the risks, Mount Everest remains a symbol of human determination and courage. Sherpas, local mountain guides, play a vital role in helping climbers navigate the difficult paths.

- 1- Mount Everest is in the Andes Mountains. (True/ False)
- 2- The height of Mount Everest is 8.849 meters below sea level. (True/ False)
- 3- What challenges do climbers face while climbing Mount Everest?
- 4- Sherpas assist climbers on their journey up Mount Everest. (True/ False)
- 5- Where is Mount Everest located? **(20Marks)**

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Q2 Answer the following questions from your textbook passage:

- 1- What does Karen do in her spare time?
- 2- Who is on holiday?
- 3- When did Karen go back to school?
- 4- The three parts of the school year in England are called
- 5- How many weeks' holiday does Simon have every year? **(20 Marks)**

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Q3 Do as required:

- 1- She has written her poem. (Use: "ever")
- 2- Suggest to your friend to meet at night.
- 3- The man enjoys (eating/ eat/ to eat) chicken. (Choose)
- 4- They cut the tree yesterday. (Negative)
- 5- I can speak Turkish. I can't speak French. (Join the sentences) **(20 Marks)**

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Q4 Story time: Answer of the following questions:

- 1- Halla asked Yassir if he was frightened. Why didn't he answer?
- 2- What is the story about?
- 3- The characters in the story are and
- 4- What is the name of the last day of the year?
- 5- The story happened last week. (True/ False) **(20 Marks)**

.....

Q5 A/ Complete all the following:

- 1- Closed X opened never X
- 2- Will not, won't should not,
- 3- Play, played take,
- 4- F _nt _st _c, fantastic bo _i _
- 5- Four, forth twenty,

Q5 B/ Write a paragraph about Eid Al-fitr. (20 Marks)

Appendix 3

The Validity of the Interest Test

University of Mosul
College of Basic Education
Department of English

Interest Test

Honourable professor

Good Greeting,

The researcher is conducting a study titled "The Effect of Using Crossword Puzzle on First Stage Intermediate Students' Achievement and Interest in English ". To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher has prepared the interest test. In light of your experience, know-how, and scientific outlook in this field, you have been nominated to go through the test, add, delete and/or modify the items so as to prove the validity of the test.

Your effort and time are highly appreciated.

The Researcher

The Interest Test

Dear

It is my pleasure to kindly ask you to go through the items of the following questionnaire and state the extent of their application to you on the basis of the three options given opposite to each item. Please tick with (✓) in the square that applies to you.

	Items	A high extent	A medium extent	A low extent
1	I feel happy when I receive my English language book.			
2	I feel that the English grammar activity ends fast.			
3	I would like to participate in English language lessons.			
4	I try to get high degrees in English.			
5	I feel happy when the teacher gives me homework.			
6	I feel jealous of my clever classmates.			
7	I would like to be an English language teacher in the future.			
8	I feel anxious when examinations of English are near.			
9	I enjoy talk English with my classmates.			
10	I would like preparing educational aids for English language lessons.			
11	I enjoy answering English language exercises during my spare time.			
12	I would like to hear English songs.			
13	I pay attention to the English words in advertisements.			
14	I like computer educational games and other means.			
15	I follow the topics presented by the teacher.			
16	I feel happy when the teacher nominates me to give an example.			
17	I always attend English Language lessons.			
18	I pay attention to the application of English grammar in my speech.			