Efficacy of Teaching Grammar Communicatively at University Level: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Teaching grammar effectively at the university level requires expertise and a practice-based approach; but the predominantly traditional method in grammar teaching is still being exercised by language teachers. To bring about an effective teaching plan, the method of teaching grammar needs to be changed from the traditional approach to the practical one. The study highlights the effectiveness of teaching grammar communicatively. For this purpose, the researchers chose the qualitative research paradigm. The data was collected through observations, note-taking, and semi-structured interviews. Purpose sampling was used for this study and the data were analyzed using ‘Interpretive Approach’. Action research approach was used in this study; hence the study was divided into two phases: recognition and intervention. The former phase was aimed at investigating the problems ESL students faced while learning grammar at the university level; whereas the latter phase was aimed at analyzing the efficacy of communicative grammar teaching at the university level through AR. In the light of the findings, the study resulted in promising results. Furthermore, it is suggested that similar studies need to be conducted in future to modify grammar teaching and make it interesting and effective through the communicative way of teaching at the university level.

KEYWORDS

Communicative Grammar Teaching, Effectiveness, Action Research, Traditional Teaching, ESL learners, ESL teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

A traditional way of teaching grammar has been in practice at educational institutions in the interior parts of Pakistan in which the pattern of teaching is merely imposing rules of a language. Bano et al. (2022) mentions that most of the EFL teachers use traditional methods of teaching which results in less productive classrooms in Pakistan. It is the concern of ESL teachers to make grammar teaching to form correct sentences and make it communicative (Bancone-Minaflinou, 2018). On the contrary, the traditional method of teaching grammar hardly assists ESL learners to make the use of grammar in their spoken and written English.

In this globalized world things are changing rapidly and so is the case with teaching in which outdated methods of teaching grammar can hardly be useful for ESL learners. In Pakistani EFL context, a new method of teaching grammar is required Shamim-ur- Rasool (2021). Concerning the use of communicative teaching of grammar, it is generally believed that traditional grammar teaching can be overcome and replaced by considering form, content and use of grammar in the life situation. Generally, one of the most effective ways of teaching is to engage the learners in which they undergo learning of specific aspects of that particular language as learning takes place more effectively by doing but not by saying. Furthermore, the research studies have concluded that learning a language requires practical approaches in which the learners go through the practical process of learning. Learning achieved through practical approaches becomes more effective than the one which is obtained through grammatically. Additionally, this study is an attempt to investigate how far the communicative approach to teaching grammar becomes useful. The findings of the study can be useful for in-service teachers of English in various contexts where rule-based teaching is pre-dominant.

Significance of the Study

The study can be useful where the methods of teaching grammar are predominantly traditional. By the use of communicative approach, ESL teachers will be able to influence the learning outcomes of ESL learners significantly. Besides, the standard of teaching grammar at university level can be modified as the concern of teachers will be the practical aspects of grammar teaching. In this way, there can a positive impact on the learning outcomes of ESL students in the sense that they will be able to utilize the obtained learning in their oral and written communication.

Research Questions

Research questions set for this study are mentioned as follows.

1. What are the drawbacks of traditional grammar teaching at the university level?
2. How can communicative grammar teaching be effective at the University level?
Research Objectives

The objectives of the research study are given as follows.

1. To find out the drawbacks of Traditional Grammar Teaching at the University level.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of Communicative Grammar Teaching at the University level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Grammar

Teaching grammar is an important part of foreign language teaching which explains how language works in its simplest parts such as sentences and paragraphs. By teaching grammar accurately actual nature of a language is exhibited to learners. Ellis (2006) explains. “Teaching grammar implicates any instructional technique which attract learners’ consideration to some definite grammatical form in such a way that it assists them either to comprehend it meta-linguistically and/or process it in comprehension and / or production so that they can internalize it ” (Ellis, 2006, p.84). Moreover, without teaching grammar understanding and acquiring language would be confusing for learners. “People agree that grammar is a very important for learners because without a better knowledge of grammar, learners’ language development will be hampered” (Richards and Renandya, 2002, p. 145).

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

In the context of language teaching and learning, there is a variety of teaching methods and approaches available. Among these all approaches and methods, Communicative language teaching is the most appreciated, liked and implemented in classroom by language teachers (Alharabi, 2013; Akram & Mahmood, 2011, Karim 2004). According to Li (1998) CLT approach was first recognized in 1970s (Mazumder, 2011) in Europe. It focuses the language skills such as (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Besides, it lays stress on language use in real life situations. It is regarded as a revolutionary method in the field of second language teaching (Farhad, 2013).

Communicative Language Teaching is an approach of language teaching which targets to enhance learners’ communicative competence. Previously, in language learning main concern was to develop learners’ grammatical competence (Richards, 2006). CLT is based on the notion that by exercising various activities like role play, simulations, discussions and talking about personal experiences etc. the learners can be involved in the classroom to make maximum use of target language thereby to increase their communicative competence. Hence, Communicative language teaching emboldens the learners to learn the target language by putting them into language learning environment and by sharing personal experiences in target language. CLT differs from traditional language teaching approach in language teaching goals, the process of teaching and learning, the concerned activities of teaching in the classroom and the status of teachers and learners (Richards, 2006). In CLT teachers are not merely speakers in the class rather they become facilitators, guides and moderator etc. students are centered and they become more active participants of the class activities. Moreover, the topics of CLT class are also out of the domain of traditional grammar class.

Geyser (2008) highlights one prominent advantage of CLT which is according to him incorporation of all four skills of language in CLT class. The CLT approach empowers the teacher to build a balanced relation and good understanding with his students by observing them doing various activities and responding them subsequently during activities. CLT method can be adapted for learners of any level and may be suitable for learners of different competence and linguistic background. Teachers involve their learners more for learning process in a CLT class.

Nunan (2004) states that CLT is actually not a single teaching method, it is in fact a combination of various approaches. In the same vein, Harmer (2009) states that CLT is often criticized prejudiced and it is more in favor of native speakers because the activities used in CLT create an unlimited choice of language practices by learners making it hard for non-native instructors to encounter many language problems which arise during activities. And sometimes CLT becomes a difficult method for teachers to teach effectively who are less proficient in second language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative paradigm was adopted in this study and an Action Research approach was chosen as a method. In this connection, Kemmis and McTaggart's (2005) model was chosen which contains cyclic processes such as act, plan, observe and reflect.

Data Collection

The site of the study was the Department of English at Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science and Technology, Nawabshah. The data were collected from the first-year students of the BS Program in two phases. The first phase consists of “reconnaissance” and the second phase consists of “intervention” (Laghari et al, 2021). The former phase dealt with the issues ESL students faced in learning grammar; whereas the latter phase dealt with the effectiveness to be brought for ESL learners through communicative grammar.
Data Analysis
Data were analyzed using the ‘Interpretive Approach’ method as this study adopted qualitative research.

Reconnaissance
Reconnaissance took place in the first stage of the data collection and the purpose of the reconnaissance was to gain an in-depth understanding of the grammar teaching issues. By conducting an investigation, the researchers came to know about the drawbacks of teaching grammar traditionally. To understand the phenomenon of grammar teaching, the researchers conducted detailed observations which were in all as enlisted below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S#</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Indefinite Tenses</td>
<td>Understanding the rule and making the sentences</td>
<td>2.00 hours</td>
<td>Students were able to make the isolated sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Continuous Tenses</td>
<td>Understanding the rule and making the sentences</td>
<td>2.00 hours</td>
<td>Students were able to make the isolated sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Perfect Tenses</td>
<td>Understanding the rule and making the sentences</td>
<td>2.00 hours</td>
<td>Students were able to make the isolated sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Perfect Continuous Tenses</td>
<td>Understanding the rule and making the sentences</td>
<td>2.00 hours</td>
<td>Students were able to make the isolated sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Active Voice and Passive Voice</td>
<td>Understanding the rule and making the sentences</td>
<td>2.00 hours</td>
<td>Students were able to make the isolated sentences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations
In observation one, it was a Functional English class and the teacher was teaching grammar. He started grammar with a definitional approach. He wrote definitions of Simple tenses: present, past and future and made students write. Then he wrote the rules of making sentences. In this way, he asked the students to write sentences following the given rules. Thus he ended the class after listening to their sentences. In observation two, it was observed that the teacher started teaching continuous tenses. Following the same method, he wrote the definition of Present Continuous on the board along with its rules. Then he asked the students to write them in their notebooks and make sentences accordingly. He applied the same procedure for the remaining tenses. In observation three, four and five, the same teaching method was exercised by the teacher. It was merely the definitional approach to teaching grammar. The mere focus of the teacher remained on rule-based grammatical items and sentence structure.

Intervention
Based on the outcomes of the reconnaissance, the researchers set an action plan to implement in the class to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching grammar communicatively. A total of thirteen lessons were prepared and implemented in the class. The lessons were adapted from the book ‘Intermediate English Grammar’ which is composed by Ramond Murphy (see Appendix 1). The details of every lesson are mentioned as follows.

Action Plan
The intervention phase was well-planned. It contained four Action Research Cycles (ARCs). Each ARC contained four lessons. Each lesson contained grammar activities to attain specific objectives at the end of the lesson. To begin with, I adopted lessons from ‘Intermediate English’ composed by Raymond Murphy. The first ARC was based on teaching the practical use of Simple, Continuous and Perfectives in real-life situations (see fig. 1 Appendix 2). Initially, I was worried about the success of the first ARC as it was the first time. I faced difficulty while putting the students into problem-solving exercises. In those situations, I explained the purpose to them but it did not work much as the students were used to lecturing. The first ARC went in explaining the uses of the exercises and engaging the students. However, some of the frontbenchers were good at responding and solving the given exercises; whereas the majority of the students were reluctant to go with problem-solving situations.

While reflecting on the teaching practices of the first cycle, I designed the lesson for the second ARC. In this cycle, I planned to tell ESL learners the uses of continuous perfectives and some future uses. In this regard, I adopted lessons from the book. After giving them a theoretical understanding of the mentioned tenses, I engaged them in the book which showed the practical differences between the perfectives and continuous perfectives. The purpose of this exercise was to tell them the difference between the two in a real-life situation. Afterwards, I asked the students to compose meaningful sentences using perfectives and continuous perfectives. After they were done with their sentences, I randomly checked their sentences. In the next lesson, I put them in the exercise given on the next page of the lesson. The exercise was based on a real-life situation related to the practical use and difference between the two. The second cycle went the way I had planned. Likewise, the lessons for the third and fourth cycles were planned and implemented accordingly keeping in view the outcomes of the previous cycles.
Findings Of The Study
The Action Research approach discussed results and findings as presented below.
In the observatory phase, it was observed that grammar teaching was merely rule-based which did not become operational for the students in the sense that they were not in a position to use it in their spoken and written English. In this study, it was tangibly observable that a communicative way of teaching grammar has various benefits for the students.

- The lessons designed contained real and critical situations where the ESL learners could use grammatical items according to the given situations.
- The lesson design went useful in the sense that the learners were able to solve the problems using grammar without focusing on it.
- The exercises given were beneficial for the students’ understanding; learning and practice see Appendix 2.
- The lessons were systematic and organized since they used bottom-up and top-down approaches to learning: simple to complex see Appendix 1.
- There were modifications in the successive lessons as we considered the students’ views and included them in the upcoming lessons.
- The conceptual learning took place as the learners were taught the purpose and the use of respective grammatical items, say, using reported speech in writing. They were not only taught about converting a direct speech into an indirect one but they were also taught the purpose of conversion and its importance in academic writing. Since the sense of both direct and indirect speech is the same, they were taught to use them accordingly in particular situations.
- Critical situations created during teaching grammar were supportive for the learners. In this way, they were put into the situations to make proper use of grammar.
- Initially, the problems encountered in the first Action Research Cycle were dealt with effectively in successive ARCs.
- The following ARCs were implemented in accordance with our planning. The aims and objectives achieved were satisfactory.
- It was an innovative way of teaching grammar in a way that we created situations relating to respective grammatical items, used grammar in them and put the ESL learners into their practice accordingly.
- By doing so, ESL learners were able to utilize grammar for communication purposes: written as well as oral.

Discussion and Conclusion
Findings show that the study led to promising results. The study was mainly based on two research questions. In response to the first question ‘What are the drawbacks of traditional grammar teaching at the university level?’ the study concluded that the traditional method of teaching English results in non-satisfactory outcomes of learning. Unfortunately, over-stressed traditional grammar teaching method has crippled ESL students’ flexible use of language and disregarded other language skills (Eldoumi, 2012). Consequently, students were only able to cram the rules of grammar, but they were not able to use them for oral and written communication. Furthermore, the lack of ESL learners’ engagement in practical tasks of using grammar in real-life situations led to insignificant learning outcomes. Whereas, the second research question ‘How effective communicative grammar teaching can be at the University level?’ responded that Communicative Grammar Teaching can be effective in terms of providing ESL learners with rich insights into the effectiveness of communicative grammar. Concerning this, Kirn and Baig (2021) staunchly believe that due to an adequate change in ESL teaching and learning, the role of a teacher as a facilitator stands firm. While negating the role of a teacher as the authority, they believe that a conducive learning environment is a solution to effectively deal with traditional grammar teaching.

The study suggests relevant research in their particular dimension. Traditional teaching method adversely influences ELS learners’ learning outcomes. In order to ensure effective learning, the use of communicative grammar teaching can be helpful and useful for the learners to enable them to be effective communicators. There is a dire need for further research to redress the concerns of university students, particularly in the dimension of grammar teaching.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT
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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS
It is declare that all authors don’t have any conflict of interest. It is also declare that this article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.
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