

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

DEDUCTIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING AND LEARNING GRAMMAR IN THE UNIVERSITY ESL CLASSROOM: EFFECTIVENESS AND THE ATTITUDES OF THE UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

This experimental study endeavors to assess the efficacy of teaching grammar deductively in the university English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom and the perceptions of the undergraduates towards this top down approach. The study integrated both qualitative and quantitative data collecting instruments namely the pre and post-tests, the student attitude questionnaires and the focus group discussions. The data gathered through the pre and post-tests were analyzed quantitatively to discover the effectiveness of the deductive approach to teach grammar in the ESL classroom. The student responses for the questionnaires and focus group discussions provided the necessary data to explore the attitudes of the undergraduates regarding the above phenomena and they were respectively analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results vindicated that teaching grammar deductively is a better approach in the university ESL classroom and plays a more effective role in facilitating the learning process. It is a learner-friendly and preferred approach by the students in the university ESL classroom.

Keywords: Deductive approach, ESL classroom, grammar

1. Introduction

Learning grammar is undoubtedly an important element in learning the English language. Moreover, “English grammar is not easy to learn for both native and non-native speakers” (M. Obeidat & Alomari, 2020, 2020, p.280). An adequate knowledge of grammar will assist the language learners to construct grammatically correct meaningful sentences and without a satisfactory grasp of grammar knowledge, the use of language will be subdued (Mahjoob, 2015). Consequently, it is evident that teaching of grammar holds a crucial role in teaching ESL settings as well. Thus, it is identified that the instructors employ various approaches to teach grammar in the ESL classroom. Among those approaches, it is evident that both deductive and inductive approaches are being widely used by the teachers for teaching grammar. As emphasized by many scholars (e.g.:- (Mohammed et al. (2008), (Wardani & Kusuma (2020))), deductive approach is a rule driven approach to teach grammar in which the teacher works from the more general to the more specific whereas the inductive approach is almost the reverse of the deductive approach. Yet, there has been a controversial debate over the years between the educationists, teachers and also the students in applying the most effective technique

of these two approaches for teaching and learning grammar of the target language. Nevertheless, it is identified that many teachers in universities prefer to teach grammar deductively in their ESL classrooms as a pedagogical strategy to ensure that the students understand what is taught especially when teaching grammar rules (Ahmadzai et al., 2019). This is due to the fact that “there are so many obscure rules and exceptions that make it difficult for the learners to understand this aspect of language” (M. Obeidat & Alomari, 2020, 2020, p.280). Correspondingly, when it comes to the Sri Lankan universities, it is seen that the Department of English Language Teaching of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka offers ongoing English programmes for all the Faculties of the University and the lecturers employ various strategies to teach English grammar for the students. In the Faculty of Applied Sciences, in addition to the four main skills of English, grammar is taught as a separate component at every level. Most of the times, the teachers who teach grammar in this Faculty prefer and employ the explicit/deductive teaching of grammar rather than implicit/inductive grammar teaching. Hence, it is important to find out the effectiveness of this approach and how students perceive it. Although a number of research studies have been piloted around the world to explore the effectiveness and the preferences of the students regarding the said grammar teaching approaches, (e.g.:- Ahmadzai et al. (2019), Mahjoob (2015), Fleming (2018), (Wardani & Kusuma (2020)), only a few studies have been steered in the ESL classrooms in the Sri Lankan context. Furthermore, to the researchers’ knowledge, it is hard to find out research studies conducted in the university ESL settings that have been addressed to find out the effectiveness and the perceptions of the undergraduates towards these teaching approaches and this study attempts to fill in this gap.

1.1 Research questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between the teacher’s use of deductive approach and the learners’ acquisition of the grammar rules of tenses?
2. What are the university students’ perceptions towards teaching grammar deductively in the ESL classroom?

2. Methodology

The present study used a mixed method experimental approach which integrated both quantitative and qualitative research methods incorporating three different types of data collecting instruments namely the pre and post-tests, student attitude questionnaires and focus group discussions. The quantitative data from the classroom tests were used to check whether the deductive approach plays an effective role in the grammar teaching-learning process. The questionnaires and the focus group discussions provided quantitative and qualitative data respectively to find out the perceptions of the learners regarding the deductive grammar teaching approach. A total of 50 randomly selected first year science undergraduates with average proficiency levels in English and two teachers of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka were selected as the informants. They were randomly assigned into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was fed with the deductive approach while the teaching of grammar was continued inductively in the control group. The data collection process was undertaken within a period of two months (16 teaching hours) and three grammar lessons were selected to teach during the study. The data gathered through the pre and post-tests were mainly analyzed quantitatively with the purpose of discovering the effectiveness of these two approaches to teach grammar in the ESL classroom. The student responses for the questionnaires provided the necessary data to explore the attitudes of the undergraduates regarding the above phenomena and they were analyzed quantitatively. In addition, the data gathered through focus group discussions conducted with 20 randomly selected students from both groups (10 from each group) in order to have an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of the students were analyzed qualitatively.

3. Results and Discussions

Is there a significant relationship between the teacher’s use of deductive approach and the learners’ acquisition of the grammar rules of tenses? Based on the analysis of the collected data, the results vindicated that teaching grammar deductively is really a more effective approach in the university ESL classroom. As displayed in the line chart below, the pre-test results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean values between the two groups before the intervention. Yet, although the post-test marks of both experimental and control groups are higher than that of the pre-test marks, a significantly higher transformation in the performance is displayed by the experimental group compared with the control. In addition, independent samples t-test was run using the SPSS statistics version 23 to see if the difference between groups is significant. It is found that the difference is significant in the inter-group post-test results and accordingly the statistical analysis of the pre and post-test marks of the experimental group disclosed a significant change between the teaching of grammar separately and the intended learning outcome than the control group.

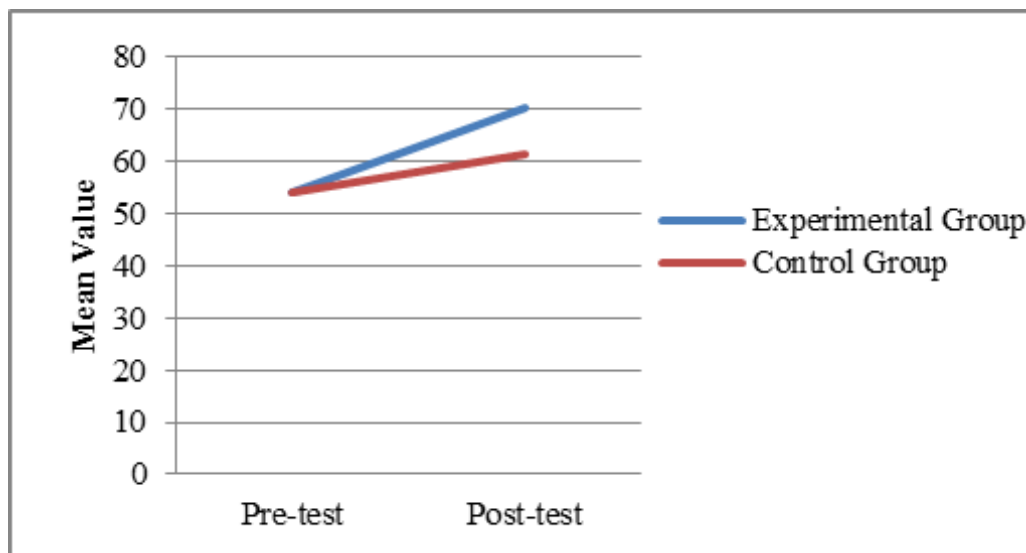


Figure 1. Performance of the students

What are the university students’ attitudes towards teaching grammar deductively in the ESL classroom?

As indicated in the below table, it is clearly perceptible that the student attitude questionnaires confirm that a vast majority of the undergraduates have positive attitudes towards teaching grammar deductively in their English language classroom rather than using the inductive approach. They have emphasized that they can very easily understand the grammar rules without much effort and in less time period when the grammar rules are explained separately at the beginning of the lesson. Further, they have stated that they can make a note of the rules clearly and it is easy to memorize as well. In addition, a majority of the participants (almost 78%) have also confirmed that the application of this approach by the teacher is perceived by them as an effective teaching technique.

Moreover, according to the findings of the focus group discussions, the student participants, revealing their further views regarding the use of the deductive approach in their grammar classroom have stated that this is a very effective and user-friendly approach not only for them but also for the teacher as well. Further, they have mentioned that they have a very limited time to allocate for learning English with the heavy academic workload they have in the main subject streams that they are following. Yet, they have claimed that they are in a dire need to learn the English language since the medium of instructions is English and therefore, English is very vital for them to learn. Thus,

Table 1. Levels of attitudes of the students towards teaching grammar deductively.

Statement	Percentage of levels of attitudes				
	Totally disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Totally agree
Facilitates the understanding of the grammar rules very well.	0	0	8	20	72
Grammar rules can easily be memorized	0	6	6	56	32
Grammar rules can clearly be noted down.	0	0	0	20	80
Enhances the retention of the learnt grammar rules.	4	10	12	50	24
Grammar rules can be memorized methodically.	0	0	10	40	50
Facilitates the understanding of the grammar rules with less time	0	0	20	30	50
Facilitates the understanding of the grammar rules without much effort.	0	0	16	32	52
When the grammar rules are taught at the beginning of the lesson, it is easy to engage in the exercises.	0	0	6	30	64

they have specified that this approach will be beneficial for them to learn the grammar rules without consuming much time and effort so that they can save their time to occupy in the other subjects as well. Further, they have claimed that this will provide them space to engage in more grammar practice activities additionally to improve their abilities. Thus, they have stated that this will enhance their level of accuracy in the use of grammar in their academic writings which would help them to express themselves with more clarity.

4. Conclusion

Despite the fact that some educationists favor the induct Obeidative approach as an effective method to teach ESL grammar, based on the findings, the present study concludes that these explicit grammar instructions in the university ESL classroom plays a more effective role in teaching grammar in the language teaching and facilitating the learning process. In addition, the findings indicate that the teaching of grammar deductively is welcomed by undergraduates in the teaching-learning process. Further, it is also accepted as a useful strategy in classroom interactions by a majority of students. Hence, it can be concluded that the deductive approach is effective, a learner- friendly and the most preferred approach of the students to be used in the university ESL classroom. Moreover, these findings are aligned with most of the other research studies conducted (e.g.:- Benitez-Correa et al. (2019), (Ahmadzai et al. (2019)) and therefore, it is obvious that the deductive approach is one of the effective methods to teach grammar in the university ESL classroom that is preferred by the undergraduates. However, in view of the limitations, this study was piloted in one Faculty of one State University in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the sample size is relatively small and it does not represent the whole population of ESL students in universities. Thus, these findings may not be generalizable for the whole population of undergraduates. Similarly, regarding the time frame, only three grammar lessons were taught during the research period of two months. Therefore, the students' perceptions and beliefs about teaching of grammar deductively would only have been based on that particular two month period. Therefore, future research may conduct with a wider sample and with longer

period of intervention focusing more grammar lessons.

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