



AN ACTION RESEARCH ON INCREASING STUDENTS' INTEREST IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR LESSONS

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INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that the teaching of grammar in the second language classroom is one of the major concerns for the success of second language learning. However, the importance of grammar as a communicative competence has been ignored, and for a long time the misconception of the view that grammar is merely teaching of forms has been at the core of English language teaching. As stated by Abeywickrama (2008), English language is considered as a highly prestigious language, which provides access to all kinds of privileges. As a result, more importance is given to learning English in Sri Lanka, and English language has become a compulsory subject in the Sri Lankan Education curriculum. There are many sub components in a language where grammar is considered as a significant component to improve the accuracy in both written and oral communication and to overcome the errors made by the speakers. In particular, learning grammar is significant for second language speakers.

Teaching grammar is a complex concept that differs according to whom it is being taught and therefore it cannot be explained in one way. However, as cited in Oz and Orak (2018) from a common point of view, Wilcox (2004) stressed that grammar is defined as “a system of rules which allows the users of the language in question to create meaning.” Accordingly, it depicts that grammar is generally considered as the structures or rules of a language which in turn causes the misinterpretation that grammar teaching should focus minimally on forms and rules. Yet, the innovative paradigm shifts in second language learning and teaching have shed light on the real meaning of grammar and how it should be taught. According to Takala (2016), grammar is an important tool for successful communication. Accordingly, it has been considered that grammar competence is also a part of communicative competence.

However, the importance of grammar as a part of communicative competence and the misconception of the view that grammar is merely teaching of forms should be taken in to consideration by all language teachers (Oz & Orak, 2018). Kahan (2007), in his study on ‘Effective grammar teaching in ESL classroom,’ proposed that teaching students how to use grammar in their daily lives instead of just giving the grammar structures and rules by following traditional steps is a very successful way for their language learning development. Most of the research findings witnessed that English language teaching and learning in Sri Lanka have been a failure due to lack of interest and motivation of students in learning English. Therefore, it is very important to change the traditional ways of teaching grammar in order to maximize both success and motivation of our students.

Accordingly, the purpose of this action research is to explore the reasons for students’ lack of interest in learning grammar and to find out ways to increase students’ interest in learning grammar in the English as a Second Language classroom. Considering the purpose, this study seeks answers for the following questions.

01. What are the underlying reasons of students’ lack of interest in grammar lessons?
02. What can a teacher do to increase the students’ interest in grammar lessons?



METHODOLOGY

For the current study, an action research design that is classroom-based and teacher initiated, was undertaken. A sample of 30 students in Grade 10 in a government school located in Rathnapura were selected as the participants for the study. It is a mixed class with ten male and twenty female students. According to the University Test of English Language (UTEL), these learners' current proficiency level can be decided as band 3. As both the conductor of the study and the teacher of the particular class, the researcher spent two hours a week with students to teach grammar. This study was carried out over four weeks and it began with a questionnaire and ended with a semi-structured interview and focus group discussions. The questionnaire was employed to collect data on the students' perceptions of grammar lessons and aimed to find the underlying reasons for their lack of interest in grammar learning. Then an action plan was implemented to change students' mindsets to grammar lessons and increase their interest. Following this, semi-structured interviews with five students and focus group discussions were administered to get their perceptions of grammar lessons after the action plan was implemented. Based on the findings, the students' perceptions and opinions about the grammar lessons before and after the implementation of the action plan were compared and analysed.

The action plan was undertaken to find the solution to the problems in grammar teaching and learning in the classroom based on the implications from the students' responses to the questionnaire. All the students responded stating that they have issues in understanding the grammar points in the English Language and therefore they are not interested in learning grammar. Accordingly, it was clear that the teachers followed the traditional method of grammar teaching where more emphasis is given to teach the structure of the grammar points and then having an exercise following the particular structure of the grammar point. This was the reason for students to be bored and not interested in grammar lessons. Students also pointed out that, that they always experience a teacher centred classroom. According to the responses of the students, they were experiencing classroom sessions where the teacher teaches grammar lessons presenting many sets of rules and abstract structures and the students were supposed to accept those structures without questioning them. Then they were asked to apply them using exercises such as fill in the blanks with the appropriate grammar rule. Therefore, to increase the interest of the students in grammar learning, the action plan was designed with more innovative methods and techniques and the researcher displayed a positive teacher role in the classroom paying attention to the effect of teacher's attitudes towards students on their motivation and participation to the lesson.

Accordingly, the action plan focused on delivering grammar points through the inductive approach instead of the deductive approach. More student-centered activities were included in the grammar lessons with the aim of creating a dynamic classroom environment. In such a classroom, the students would actively participate in the language learning process. The next step of the action plan was to increase the student talk time as most of the students in their responses to the questionnaire highlighted that in the grammar class teacher 'talk time' was very high and students were just listening by accepting the input without questioning or requesting any clarifications. Accordingly, the action plan focused on creating a communicative grammar classroom that maximizes interest and participation in collaborative activities. Finally, it was highlighted from the questionnaire that teachers' attitudes were also a key factor that affects the increase of the interest of the students. Thus, the role of the teacher is to be supportive throughout the teaching process and be positive about the mistakes of the students. It would lead to a pleasant and welcoming classroom environment where students feel confident when making errors and correcting them. Figure 01 below was designed to show the grammar lessons model in the students' minds in light of their experiences, which was designed according to the results of the questionnaire. Figure 02 was

designed for the action plan and the solutions that aim to increase students' interests in grammar lesson.

Figure 01: The grammar class experienced by the students

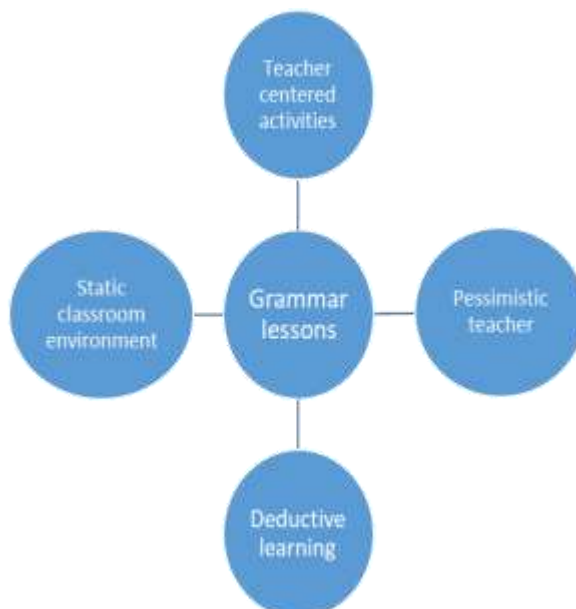
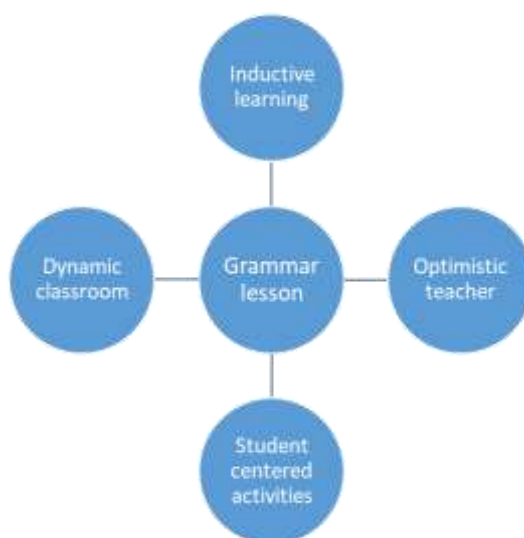


Figure 02: Grammar lessons based on the action plan



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show a clear difference in the perception of the students of grammar lessons after implementing the action plan. The results of the study indicate that the level of the interest of learning grammar was increased by implementing interactive and student-centered activities.

The following steps are the changes made during the action research process in the class:

01. Student centered activities



In this step, student-centered activities were incorporated in the classroom to increase the students' participation and interest. Accordingly, group work, pair work, individual work, and dialogs were incorporated in the teaching and learning process. During these activities, a significant difference was observed in the participation and interest of the students and this difference is clearly presented through the results of the interview. In the interviews, most of the students claimed that their interest in learning grammar has increased through the student-centered activities.

Student 01: *“I did not have any interest in learning English, especially, English grammar. But with this new method of implementing student centered activities now my interest of learning English has been increased”*

Student 02: *“I love to participate in collaborative activities in the English class and it helps me to improve my grammar knowledge”*

Student 03: *“Teaching through interactive activities help me to remember and practice the English grammar point very well”*

Learners who are more active were dominant in the classroom when integrating more student-centered activities. In the interview following data was obtained;

Student 05: *“When I learn grammar now, I can engage in the classroom activities and become a part of the lesson. It helps me to increase my interest in grammar learning”*

According to the results obtained from the questionnaire, the researcher intended to increase the student talk time during the class through student-centered activities. The main aim of integrating collaborative activities was to increase students' interaction. Focusing on this, the students were asked to act out role-plays in the classroom by focusing on certain grammar points. Even though the classroom is virtual, the participation of the students in the group work and pair work was very high when compared with the classroom which was held before implementing the action plan. The results of the interviews also indicated this significant difference in the students' perceptions. They all said that when they practice the grammar points focusing on real life situations, it is easy for them to identify in which situations they should use that particular grammar point when speaking or writing. This in turn would help to minimize the grammar errors in speaking.

02. Inductive teaching

In this step, the grammar lessons were taught implicitly without directly giving the structure of the grammar point. The grammar lessons were taught through songs, videos, movie clips etc. Therefore, it could be seen that integration of these new methods in teaching grammar brought a remarkable enthusiasm in the students to learn grammar.

Students 04: *“When teacher teaches past tense through songs, I understood the lesson very well and now I know how to use it in the appropriate situations.”*

Student 06: *“I love the way teacher is teaching grammar and the videos teacher is playing in the classroom was so interactive. I can learn the grammar point very well through videos and movie clips.”*

Learning and playing with grammar in context enhanced learning the structures in a holistic way. In the interview all the students pointed out that they liked to learn grammar rules from the context. Further, they all agreed that the grammar forms became more meaningful and authentic when they are taught based on the authentic ways.



03. Dynamic classroom

In this step, the main concern was to create an active classroom instead of having a static classroom environment. For that, more authentic materials such as pictures, flash cards, texts, worksheets etc were used in grammar teaching. After the texts were delivered to the students, discussions about the topics were made in addition to grammar teaching. At the end of the activities, the students seemed to like the texts and tasks that were used in the lesson. Based on the findings of the interview, it was reported that doing new things out of the textbook and not following merely a textbook increased the students' enthusiasm.

Student 07: *“When we were taught simple present tense by using pictures, texts, I learned to build up sentences in the present tense. Also now I know in which situation I should use simple present tense”*

04. Optimistic teacher

The main intention of this step was to change the teacher from just teaching the structure and rule of the grammar point to a facilitator who allows students to understand the structure of the grammar point. The results of the interview showed that students were motivated when the teacher did not correct their mistakes immediately and let the students correct their errors by themselves or with the help of peers. The teacher was there to facilitate the students and the students are the ones who actively engage in the lesson by solving their problems related to grammar points. This was a very good action to enhance the interest of the students and motivate them to learn grammar.

CONCLUSIONS

After implementing this action plan, it was clear that the ESL students in today's society have more interest in learning English grammar points through more innovative, enjoyable and interactive ways. As Nunan (1998) claimed, “in textbooks, grammar is very often presented out of context. Learners are given isolated sentences, which they are expected to internalize through exercises involving repetition, manipulation, and grammatical transformation”. Since grammar is a major factor in a language, it should be mastered well. Moreover, as it is proved from this action plan, there is no doubt that students enjoy the lesson when they experience innovative methods along with different activities regarding the application of grammar points. Accordingly, the English as a Second Language teachers should implement an interactive language classroom by involving students in different kinds of activities where they become more active instead of using only the traditional teacher-centred method that placed emphasis only on the structure and rules of grammar which did not generate student interest.

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