

Effective Way of Teaching Grammar at the Tertiary ESL Students

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Introduction

Teaching of grammar at the tertiary level marine engineering students is a challenging task since teachers have to work hard to make grammar lessons interesting and useful along with syllabus. In general, students never show enthusiasm and interest in grammar classes. Teachers, therefore, need to explore interesting activities and unique teaching techniques to attract the attention of the students and mainly to sustain their interest in learning grammar. A language game is a viable means to achieve this goal and teachers of English can exploit this resource effectively. Crystal (2004) said "Grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in English. Additionally, it can help everyone, not only teachers of English, but teachers of anything for all teaching grammar is ultimately a matter of coming to grips with the meaning".

Precision in LSRW is an important aspect in academic and workplace environment, but students cannot exile in LSRW by ignoring grammar, because it helps the learners to speak and write without grammatical mistakes. Indisputably grammar lessons are exceptionally useful for the students to communicate their ideas free from grammatical errors. Knowledge in Grammar gives confidence to the students both in writing and speaking. Because of this reason, the syllabus at the tertiary level, especially in engineering colleges and marine engineering colleges, gives importance in teaching grammar. Penny Ur (1988) mentioned that a person who knows grammar is one who can express himself or herself in what would be considered as acceptable language. Therefore grammar is an important component of language teaching at the tertiary level. Gardner (2008) stated that "the teaching grammar methods are changed through the years, the changes occurred in materials, approaches and belief. This shows that the traditional method, material, and approaches have undergone a major transformation to ensure effective classroom environment". This is supported by Johnson (1973) and says that the goal of language games is to make language learning enjoyable.

ELT in Indian Context

English is an Associate official language in India because of its extensive usage in legal, financial, educational and business communication. After Hindi, English is the second largest spoken and written language in India. In India English language teaching divided into three phases, namely Colonial phase, Pre-Independence phase and Post-Independence phase.

Colonial phase starts from the arrival of East India Company (EIC) for trade. After the arrival of EIC in the year 1813, Christian missionaries started to spread their education and religion in India. In the Pre-Independence phase, three Universities were opened in Madras, Mumbai and Calcutta. In order to develop their English language and native people with the English language, education was given first preference in government jobs. Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian Renaissance, led the social movement demanding for western education and he was the primary reason behind the establishment of Hindu college in 1817. In 1835, English was formally introduced as a medium of instruction. Moreover, in 1835, the English Education Act of 1835 was enacted, which followed the famous Macaulay's minute. "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, - a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". (2004)

Teaching Grammar

According to David Crystal (1941), "grammar is the business of taking a language to pieces, to see how it works. It is a part of the system of a language and it is also described as the rules and regulation of a language". In fact, there is no language without grammar and grammar is a reflection of a language. The main aim of grammar is to induce people to follow the structure of a language and interpret the words in the sentences. Teaching grammar through traditional method is always a tough task for teachers. Freeman (2003) believes that thinking about the grammar as skill is a dynamic process rather than a static area of knowledge is good both for explicit and implicit grammar acquisition. Teaching can be divided into Implicit and Explicit teaching. Rothstein (2008) says that the language teacher needs to think of ways to make grammar teaching a fun, effective, memorable and meaningful experience. There are many methods of teaching grammar and they are; Inductive method, Deductive method, Functional method, teaching grammar through Situational method, teaching grammar through Text, teaching grammar through Stories, teaching grammar through Rhymes and Songs. Keyser in (1995) classified grammatical instruction as an implicit method of teaching because it does not involve rules but puts the focus on the form of input.

Methods of Grammar Teaching

The methodology of teaching grammar has gone through many changes in history. In the nineteenth-century Grammar translation method or classical method was widely used for teaching grammar. The main aim of this teaching method is to focus on reading proficiency and intellectual growth about the foreign language. It was based on the translation from target language to learner's first language and vice versa. Those who can translate from one language to another are considered successful learners. Woods and Larsen-Freeman (2000) said that "this method is mainly connected with the grammatical type of language syllabus. In this method, the teacher is authoritative. and the classroom is teacher-centred".

Direct Method

At the end of the nineteenth century, grammar-translation method was not effective in developing the communication skills as the result; the direct method was introduced to students to ensure that they use the language actively and spontaneously in the classroom. The basic tenet of the direct method is that learners should not use translation. This method receives its name from the fact that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids without using students' native language.

Oral Approach

In this method, spoken language was given more importance than written language. The lesson plan of oral approach is presentation, practice, consolidation, and testing free stage.

Audio – Lingual Method

Audio-lingual method was introduced in North America. This method was also known as Michigan method. The followers of this method stated the core of the behaviourist approach to learning which means that language is understood as a kind of behaviour. The Learning of the grammar was acquired through repetitive drilling (or pattern-practice drills) and memorization which was boring for the learners even though it was effective.

Task – Based Language Teaching

It refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language and grammar teaching. The main principle of this approach is that activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning and activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was developed in the 1970s. It commences a major shift in language teaching. The predominant aspect of this approach is to move away from the grammar from the centre of language learning course. Woods (1995) and Thornbury (1999) mentioned that "there are some extreme followers of CLT who totally reject grammar rules and

instruction and stay against grammar-based syllabuses because they believe in the natural acquisition of language”.

Rules in Teaching Grammar

Berthold (1989) said that “grammar teaching is disappointed with the traditional approach to language learning and with the low level of language acquisition of the students. The traditional method of teaching grammar fails to make the students acquire knowledge in grammar and communicate in different situations without grammatical errors”. There are some general rules that are commonly followed in teaching grammar, they are;

The Rule of Context

Grammar should be taught in the rules of context. If a grammar item is taken out of context in order to draw attention from students, the teacher should ensure that it is re-contextualized as soon as possible.

The Rule of Use

Grammar should be taught in order to facilitate the learners' comprehension and production of actual language. The teacher should create opportunities for learners to use the grammar items in various communicative situations.

The Rule of Economy

While teaching grammar, the teacher should spend less time teaching and allot more time in practicing the grammar items. This rule primarily emphasis on the importance of allotting adequate time for practicing grammar.

The Rule of Relevance

To create an enthusiastic environment, teachers should start from their interested part in grammar. They should not assume that the grammar of English is a completely different system from the learner's mother tongue, which can also be exploited for teaching grammar.

The Rule of Nature

Teaching grammar may not cause learning directly and the teacher should provide the right conditions and environment for students in learning grammar. Therefore, teachers should be like a facilitator in teaching grammar.

Language Games

Language games have an element of fun and teamwork which makes the language learning interesting and sportive. Saricoban and Metin (2000), said that “games and problem-solving activities have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, and are examples of

the most preferable communication activities, as the core grammar teaching helps students not only to gain knowledge but also helps them to apply in what they learn”. Generally, teachers are the only source for language learning for many students and they play a very significant role in creating a situation for students to feel happy in learning a language. When teachers persuade and inspire the students, they show enthusiasm in learning English. Schultz and Fisher (1988) mention that “games can stimulate and encourage students to participate in the activity since naturally, they want to beat the other team. Apart from having fun, students acquire language skills at the same time”.

Haldfield (1999) describes the importance of the language game in clear terms. His definition is as follows: “A game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun.... Games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term”. This statement highlights the importance of games in teaching language and grammar. It makes the students learn in an enthusiastic circumstance. Haldfield stresses the effectiveness of games in teaching because students are always lazy to do the tasks and easily bored with traditional teaching. Therefore, games are used appropriately in the way in which learners will actively participate and learn passionately. While discussing the advantages of language games, Haldfield (1999) says: “Games can be used at all stages of the progression from controlled to free practice, serving to atone end of the range as a memory aid and repetition drill, at the other as a chance to use the language freely and as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. They can also serve as a diagnostic tool for teacher, who can note areas of difficulty and take appropriate remedial action”.

Properties of Games

Hadfield (1999) classified language games into two types: linguistic games and communicative games. Linguistic games focus on accuracy, such as providing the correct antonym, choosing the right answer and finding errors. Communicative games focus on the successful exchange of information and ideas, such as two people identifying the differences between two pictures which are exactly same, drawing an image from words and creating a story from given words. According to Greenall (1990), the term ‘game’ is used whenever there is an element of competition between two students or teams in a language activity. Positive energy for learning can be developed by playing games and it also encourages unity and teamwork between them. There are many characteristics of games; Caillois (1957) lists six important characteristics of games in the classroom. They are:

- Fun: the activity is chosen for its light-hearted character
- Separate: it is circumscribed in time and place
- Uncertain: the outcome of the activity is unforeseeable
- Non-productive: participation is not productive

- Governed by rules: the activity has rules that are different from everyday life
- Fictitious: it is accompanied by the awareness of a different reality

Methodology

This research follows an experimental research method and students were divided into two groups; the experimental group and the control group. This research discusses various stages of the study such as questionnaire, which is used as a tool to collect the views of the students regarding language games, pre-test to know about their acquaintance in grammar, modules prepared by the researcher, and post-test after teaching sessions.

Experimental Study

. The main aim of this research is to evaluate the impact of teaching grammar through games at the tertiary level students of Marine engineering students of AMET University.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been framed for the present study.

- Students will participate actively in grammar classes when it is taught through language games.
- Students think that they can communicate effectively without any fear of grammatical errors if they have adequate knowledge of grammar.
- Students have a favorable attitude towards the teaching of grammar through games.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify whether traditional grammar teaching methodology suits tertiary level marine engineering students in the irrespective of their medium of instruction.
- To design modules of grammar with language games to the students of marine engineering, as an experimental study
- To find out whether grammar teaching through games is successful at the tertiary level marine engineering students.

Participants

The participants of the study are from the first year B.E. Marine Engineering students studying at AMET University, Chennai. There are about forty students participated in the study from the class. Students were divided into two groups, experimental group and control group in equal number (twenty in each group). These students have a low level of adequate knowledge and less interest in grammar, especially in tense and preposition. The fear and doubt themselves because of their lack of knowledge in tense. The fear of grammatical errors is a major tentative block for them. They also confuse with preposition both while writing and speaking. In order to develop

their skills in tense and preposition; communicative method of teaching is followed; teaching through games.

Questionnaire to the Students

A questionnaire is given to both control and experimental group students. The questionnaire consists of three divisions; a) knowledge of grammar b) grammar classes and c) grammar through games. It works as a tool to identify opinions and their knowledge about grammar and grammar through games. The responses from the students have been analyzed to identify their level of grammar understanding. The background information gained through questionnaire is used for preparing the modules to give practice in grammar. In all the three divisions of the questionnaire, there are statements with four options like ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’. The questionnaire has both positive and negative statements to achieve objectivity in the responses of the participants.

Analysis of the Responses of Students

Regarding grammar and its importance, 92.5% of students agree that grammar is useful for speaking English without mistakes, which shows that grammar is important for speaking language fluently and confidently. 82.5% of students are weak in writing because of grammar and 77.5% of students fear to speak due to grammar mistakes (Tab: 1.1). Student gets bored with traditional grammar teaching and they couldn’t concentrate for a long time because of rules in the grammar. Nearly 85% of student accepts that the grammar teachings are exam-centric (Tab: 1.2). 100% of students agree that teaching grammar through games will be effective and easy. From this questionnaire, we can come to the conclusion that students need a change from traditional grammar teaching and interested in game-based teaching (Tab: 1.3).

Sl. No	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1	Grammar knowledge is useful to speak English fluently and without mistakes.	37 (92.5%)	7(7.5%)
2	My friends often <u>mock at me</u> when I speak with some grammatical errors.	31(77.5%)	9(22.5%)
3	I make grammatical mistakes in my essay	33(82.5%)	7(17.5%)

Tab: 1.1

Sl. No	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1	Grammar lessons in the college are boring.	32(80%)	8(20%)
2	I hate listening to grammar rules and doing grammar exercises.	26(65%)	14(35%)
3	They prepare us for the English examination by focusing on grammar exercise.	34(85%)	6(15%)

Tab: 1.2

I. No	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1	Grammar through games makes class interesting	40(100%)	0%
2	I participate actively in language games.	35(87.7%)	5(12.5%)
3	I believe that I can learn grammar aspects quickly when teachers teach them through games.	38(95%)	2(5%)
4	Language games motivate me to learn various aspects.	38(95%)	2(5%)

Tab: 1.3

Pre-Test to the Students

In order to assess the knowledge in grammar items like tense and preposition for the control group and experimental group students, the pre-test was conducted with the maximum mark of 20. With their performance in pre-test, grammar games modules been prepared. Tabular: 2.1, shows their marks in the pre-test. By evaluating their pre-test of control group students, it's clear that they have confusion in tense and preposition. 2 students secured more than 10 to 15 marks and 15 students secured below 10 marks. 1 student secured more than 15 marks and three students secured 50% that's 10 out of 20 marks in control group. Regarding experimental group, 2 students scored between 10 to 15 and 14 students scored less than 10. 2 students secured 10 out of 20.

Stude	Marks	Studen	Marks
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nts	(out of 20)	ts	(out of 20)
1	12	11	16
2	7	12	7
3	9	13	8
4	4	14	8
5	8	15	7
6	7	16	5
7	8	17	8
8	9	18	5
9	10	19	10
10	8	20	10

Tab: 2.1 Performance of the Control Group in the Pre-test

Students	Marks (out of 20)	Studen ts	Marks (out of 20)
1	4	11	3
2	4	12	9
3	5	13	6
4	10	14	10
5	9	15	8
6	6	16	14
7	9	17	8
8	5	18	3
9	12	19	9
10	4	20	8

Tab: 2.2 Performance of the Experimental Group in the Pre-test

Language Game Modules

For teaching language game, the researcher designed two modules for six sessions to teach tense and preposition. Each session lasts for 50 minutes. Six sessions divided equally for tense and preposition; three sessions each. The language grammar modules were prepared with the pre-test and questionnaire results.

Principle Followed in the Modules

The common feature followed in each module is ‘identification’ which helps the students to get a clear idea about the specific grammatical item. This will help them to participate in the games with enthusiasm and actively. The next important feature is group work, which is the hallmark of each game, where all members help each other and develop team spirit to achieve their goal. Apart from identification and teamwork, the time limit is given for each activity of the game, which creates a challenging situation for the students. Therefore, group members have to think and act fast to answer the questions within the stipulated period of time.

Tense

This game module divided into three stages – Identification, create a sentence, counter sentence in another form. This is a group activity; five group consisting of four students. In the time limit of three sessions.

Tense Games Module

In the first stage, students are asked to identify, the tense form of the verb from the given paper. After identifying the tense form, one student should form a sentence from a given verb. After that, another student should frame another tense form from the same verb like that all four students should form a sentence in the different form of tense from the given time limit. Each group should compete with one another in identifying and framing sentences using the given verb within the given time limit. Once they finish the first form of tense, they will go for the second form of tense and third. Finally, they will be given a slot, where they have to frame a story by using all the tense form. First two sessions will be introductory session, where they will be introduced tense and its form with examples. Games modules is been introduced in third session, where they have to identify, frame a sentence and with the sentences they have to create a story.

Preposition

The game module for teaching preposition to experimental group divided into three stages; Identification, substitution and story narration. This is a group activity, each group consists of four students.

Preposition Games Module

After group division, they will be given five pictures, where they have to identify which will be the apt preposition for the picture. Once they identified the preposition, they have to substitute into a sentence. Finally with the sentences, they have to narrate a story in the given period of time. First two sessions will be an introductory session, where researcher will introduce preposition and its types with some examples. Third session will be game module session, where they will enrich their knowledge and understanding of preposition with team-spirit.

Post-Test to the Students

After the completion of six sessions, the researcher conducted post-test to find their improvement in the grammar rules. By comparing the pre-test and post-test marks, we can show the impact of teaching sessions through language games. The post-test question paper includes two types of questions related to tense and preposition. In view of the question paper pattern, there is no change between pre-test and post-test.

Performance of the Students in the Post-Test

All the students of both control group and experimental group attended the test and completed the test within the allotted time. The pattern used for the pre-test was also followed for post-test. The maximum marks for the pre-test is 20. Table 3.1 presents the marks obtained by control group students for their pre-test and post-test. Table 3.1 shows that the mean value of the pre-test score of the control group is 8.3 whereas the mean value of the post-test score is 8.45. It can be seen that the difference is 0.15.

Table 3.2 shows that the mean value of the experimental students' pre-test mean value is 7.3 whereas the mean value of the post-test score is 9.2. In other words, the difference is 1.9, which is greater than control group students.

As far as the experimental group is concerned, it can be said that there is significant difference between the pre-test and post-test performance of the students. The difference is statistically significant. The hypothesis "Teaching grammar through language games has positive impact on learners' acquisition of grammar rules" framed for the study is proved right. In other words, teaching sessions using language games has a positive effect on the performance of the students in the post-test. Therefore the study concludes that teaching grammar through language games plays a significant role in the acquisition of grammar rules. It can be suggested that teachers can use language games to motivate the students participate actively in grammar classes.

Students	Pre- test (20)	Post- test (20)	Difference in score
1	12	11	-1
2	7	9	2
3	9	8	1
4	4	6	2
5	8	7	1
6	7	9	0
7	8	10	2
8	9	8	1
9	10	11	-1
10	8	10	2
11	16	15	1
12	7	8	-1

13	8	7	-1
14	8	7	-1
15	7	7	0
16	5	6	1
17	8	8	0
18	5	7	2
19	10	12	-2
20	10	9	-1
Mean	8.3	8.75	

Table 3.1 Pre- test and Post- test Score of the control Group

Students	Pre- test (20)	Post- test (20)	Difference in score
1	4	6	2
2	4	5	1
3	5	7	2
4	10	11	1
5	9	7	-2
6	6	9	2
7	9	12	3
8	5	8	3
9	12	15	3
10	4	7	3
11	3	7	4
12	9	11	2
13	6	9	3
14	10	11	1
15	8	6	-2
16	14	15	1
17	8	7	1
18	3	7	4
19	9	13	4

20	8	11	3
Mean	7.3	9.2	

Table 3.1 Pre- test and Post- test Score of the Experimental Group

Limitations of the Study

1. The researcher has selected only two grammar items such as tense and preposition because of the factor ‘time constraint’.
2. Only six sessions were conducted to complete the teaching sessions using language games since the participants of they had to spend time for the engineering papers of the second semester.
3. The method of teaching grammar using language games consumed much time because the researcher had to explain the rules of the games and give instructions related to the game.
4. While teaching grammar through language games, the researcher had to be very careful about the entertainment aspect of the game.
5. Classroom management was a major problem because of their active participation in language games.

Findings of the Study

1. Most of the students, have negative feelings like inferiority complex, fear of speaking, fear of grammatical errors, shyness and stage fear. It is observed that the use of language games have the unique feature to make these students participate actively despite their negative emotions.
2. Another important fact is that students do not like examination oriented teaching. They expect that teachers have to use activities that ensure fun, entertainment and learning.
3. Majority of the students have positive attitude towards teaching of grammar through language games. This shows that language games can be used to accelerate the process of language learning in general.
4. It is also found that adequate knowledge in grammar rules will improve their self-confidence to communicate effectively in English.

Validity of the Hypothesis

Based on the analysis of the performance of the students in the pre- test and post- test, the following hypotheses framed for the study are proved right.

- Students have favorable attitude towards teaching of grammar through games.
- Students think that they can communicate effectively without any fear of grammatical errors if they have adequate knowledge in grammar.

- Teaching grammar through language games has positive impact on learners' acquisition of grammar rules

Scope for Further Research

1. The present study focused on two grammar items using language games. A study with a focus on direct and indirect speech, conjunction, subject verb agreement, and question formation can be attempted to get productive results.
2. Vocabulary is an important aspect in in language learning. Therefore, the future study can be undertaken to explore the effectiveness of using language games for helping the students in the development of vocabulary.

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